READ "IN TRANCE OR DEATH" IN THIS ISSUE. IT'S A STRANGE STO
BOYS, DON'T MISS THE "TWO YOUNG CASTAWAYS" ON PAGE TWENTY

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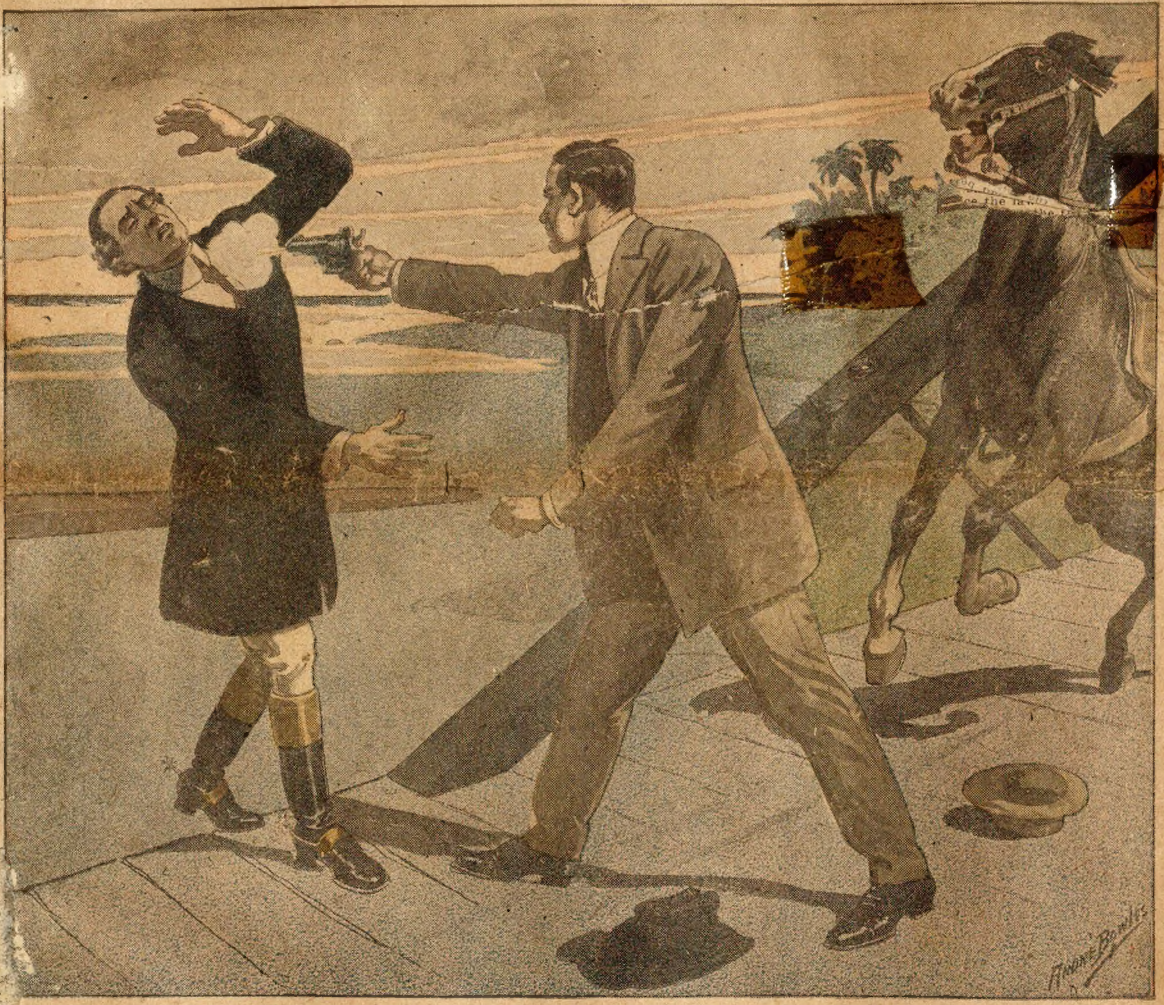


In Trance or Death;

Or, A DOCTOR'S MYSTIC POWER

By Alvah Milton Kerr

I WAS going toward a terrible experience, to meet events such as few men have ever lived through, yet all day I plodded forward steadily, a keen zest in my young limbs, a soft delight at my heart. To youthful blood, such as mine, and eyes not yet weary of looking upon the good green face of mother earth, this Floridan region was as Eden. The soft air breathing from the Mexican Gulf, the blue dazzle of distant brine, far-off ships blowing into Charlotte Bay, and above all, the quickening consciousness that, after five years of absence, I was drawing near home, gave me the feeling, I fancy, of one who first walks in Paradise. Besides, I was fresh from the cold of the North; memories of the stark, frozen lands of the great Lake Basin, and the winter winds beating through the tumultuous streets of its greatest city, were strong upon me. Contrast is the keenest of all tools in the etching of impressions. This was my region; I had known it since childhood, yet never before had it seemed so enchanting.

As I skirted the hillsides through the pines, I glanced up their slender boles with pleasure; as I passed under the bearded live-oaks in the hollows, I smiled to them as to oldtime friends. The journey, to me, was as a nameless sort of ovation, the glad thronging about me of friends as I drew near home.

Time stood at the middle of March, that day when I walked from Punta Gorda homeward to Magnolia Place, more than thirty miles away. The disnce had nothing daunting in it to a ng-limbed youth of three and twenty, ch as I was. For at the tired end of he journey was my mother's face! Ah, sweet, beckoning star, for five long years seen only in my dreams! The features of no maiden known in all my life could have lured me to quicker step, or filled me with a haste more eager.

I had come by boat from the railroad at Tampa, and with the dawn of that morning had made the pier at Punta Gorda. Too hungry of heart to wait for later or more comfortable means of conveyance, I had left my luggage, save a light bundle of linen, to be sent by a little steamer to Port Garcia two days later, and at once set out afoot for Magnolia Place.

As for my identity, and the events, small and common enough, which had attended me to the dawning of this memorable day, these are due the reader here.

All my youth can be told briefly. I was Francis Stanwood, only son of Doctor and Elizabeth Stanwood, of Magnolia Place. My earliest memory, touching myself, is of seeing my tiny figure, dressed in close-fitting velvet clothes, reflected in a mirror. I can fancy the mirror still, reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling of a great and beautiful room, and I still recall the vigorous anger with which I dashed my small fist against the glass, being outraged with the diminished figure I cut in the new clothes, and from grief at being deprived of the lovely tinted fabrics which had hitherto made me as the butterfly.

It thus appearing that I had not then advanced sufficiently in years to affect a pride in male apparel, I fancy I was yet very young. That must have been in the older New Orleans, before my father came to Florida and built the great house at Magnolia Place. What his life or my mother's b[illegible]en in the [illegible] I know not; that to me was a volume which is shut and sealed from childish eyes because of its unhealthful mystery.

Almost the first distinct remembrance of my father, I think, has as a setting the great garden at the south end of Magnolia House, where he once beat me cruelly for a childish fault. It was for a trifle or a grave offense, I know not what; my strongest impression is not of that or of the painful blows, but of the look of fiendish hatred upon his handsome face, and of my mother running screaming from the place. There were other, nay, frequent, similar, scenes after that, scorching my tender spirit with a sense of outrage, as a plant, craving sunshine and refreshing dew, may be withered by a heated blast.

I know that I hated him for the evil which he did to me: yes, evil, for that is evil which engenders strife, and good [illegible], no matter what its guise or name, only when blessings follow after it. I think I could have loved him had he been kind, for he was marvelously comely and had the talents well nigh of a god. Throughout my life, and I have looked upon the sons of many climes, I have not yet seen another man so alluring to the eye.

He had a Grecian head, clustered thick with blue-black curls, and features as pure of outline as a Gonzaga cameo. His flesh was of a clear pallor and his eyes large and of an amber brown, quick, lustrous, and so keen by times they seemed to pass their gleam into one's soul and light up and search out all that was there. With all this he was tall and strongly modeled, with a certain proud wholeness and nobility of carriage that attracted every eye. He seemed to work his will in man and woman with strange ease; perhaps, touching the good of his own soul, with dangerous sureness.

But me he could not tame. From the hour when he struck me the first blow here was war between us. After that was never conquered. I cannot hope o make it plain, but I either inherited r acquired an ineradicable resentment f his fatherhood, of the position of master over me which nature seemed ndubitably to have given him. He in urn, either for my resistance to his will or from some more inscrutable ause, seemed to look upon me with omething of repugnance, yes, with a ouch of that inclination to destroy which one might feel for a young viper. Yet, surely as a child I had a certain savoir faire that won me a way into most hearts: a boy quick and willing of oot, hungry to please where kindness rew me, and without bodily blemish hat might disappoint or offend a father's pride. My mother found me fair, know, and loved me beyond my childish nderstanding. I held to her in turn, I elieve, with such fealty as the angels old to the Father of us all.

My father's influence over her seemed s the magnet's power to draw the eedle. As he willed with her, so it was. In a sense it was very pitiful, nd yet, clearly, she was happy in her elplessness to him. He was so strong, o handsome, so dominant of atmosphere, o suave and kindly when he willed. Ah, ell, she was a woman, sweet, yielding, ot overstrong, and he was her god; ow could it be otherwise? Perhaps his nfluence over her was psychical; indeed, s it not so with all of us? The power e have upon each other—is that not he most subtle and insoluble mystery of fe?

Well, we jarred onward, my father and I, through my early years until I was sent away to school. That was when I was yet young, for it seemed imperative that we should live apart. It was a sore trial for my mother, but she yielded, for surely it seemed best. I was put in a private school at Punta Gorda, that I might not be over-far away from home. There my mother often came to see me, bringing love and cheer in a large portion, and always delicacies of a more material sort. My life was the life of any schoolboy in such environment. There I received lessons that are a portion of me still; there I made friends whose hold upon my heart shall not fail until my head is pillowed upon the breast of death, yet, none, I believe, who may properly have part in this chronicle.

During those years my father was absent much, often for months. He had been to the old world in his youth, yet was restless still, investigative, and seemingly eager to look upon and penetrate everything that lay upon the world's face. Of that which he did or saw upon these journeys I knew but little, save that he filled the house with objects of virtu, the library with rare books, and his laboratory with many and strange tools of the surgeon's trade, and intricate devices for the investigation of animal, insect and plant phenomena.

It was during the periods when my father was absent that life, to me, took on its chiefest charm. Ah, those were golden epochs! Then I came home and all was as Heaven. A memory now comes strongly upon me—the last hour we spent together, my mother and I, ere I took my departure for the school in the North. I was then grown to manhood, being in my eighteenth summer, and had finished my studies at the small academy of Punta Gorda. Seeing that he should now most probably have me nearer at hand, my father decreed that I should continue my studies in a larger school at a far greater distance from him. This being to my taste, save for the long separation from my mother, I assented without a struggle. I came home and made preparations for my long journey and long absence. During the weeks or more thus occupied my mother and I were much together, and when the last evening came we were mercifully left to each other.

I remember that we sat through all the evening upon the broad gallery at the front of the house, and tried to talk, but continually fell into silence. The whole world seemed to whisper sadly of our parting. I sat upon the porch edge at her feet, my arm across her knee, my hand clasped fast between her slender palms. A huge moon lifted itself from the low hills to the eastward, with distant tree boughs seen against it like fairy tracery upon a globe of gold. As we watched it swing slowly into Heaven we talked in broken snatches of the great world into which I was going, of the hard condition man's lack of mercy made for man, and how the real success a life achieved was not the gold it gathered but the good it wrought. She counseled me to kindness in all things, presenting it as the final, best and most potent law, and looking into her dear face I said:

"Mother, do you know, I believe that mother-love is God's love? It is pure mercy, all love, the most beautiful and moving thing of earth!"

She kissed me fondly at that, and laid her cheek down upon my head, and I felt her crying softly, and heard her lips whispering to the Creator in my behalf, and sitting there in the solemn silence, I felt something descend upon me that was never afterward lifted, a strong sense of the sacredness of human life and the solemnity and greatness of existence. It was like a consecration; from my own heart sprang an unspoken cry that I might be cherished of Heaven for her sake.

It was thus our last hour together fell, and in the morning, before the dawn blossomed, I was on my way. What befell me is scarcely relevant to this history, save to say that I acquitted myself well at the school. At the end of three years I entered the department of medicine and surgery, and with the close of another year I went to study in the hospital of the greatest city in the basin of the Lakes. During these years I had never visited my home. The distance was great and my father forbade it, so my vacations were spent with my comrades, twice in upper Michigan, once, and again, on the high prairies of Iowa.

During all this time I received weekly letters from my mother, but at last she fell silent; a month passed and no letter came, a second month passed and with it the holidays; then a third dragged by in silence and with its close, no longer able to sustain the insufferable suspense, I started for the South.

And thus it was that on that fragrant March day my eager feet, faltering by times from apprehension, were following the green road to Magnolia Place.

As I plodded onward I passed a human habitation here and there, but for the most part the road was not over good and ran through a country whose wild native beauty had suffered no violence at the hand of man. Near noon I came to a clearing in a little cuplike hollow which opened westward, the green tip of a long glistening prong of water which the sea sent inland. The place was as a dimple in the earth's round cheek, lined with a meadow of Bermuda grass, which had in its lap a small tumble-down house and a broken, straggling orchard.

The place was deserted; save for a spring that gushed from the ground not six yards from the door, it seemed entirely lifeless. The spring itself was full of action, bubbling and glinting like a handful of shaken diamonds. Near it a large bunch of bananas, golden, dead-ripe, lay upon the ground, split from the mother-plant by wind or excessive weight. On these I feasted, spicing the fat and luscious pith with orange juice. As I lay by the spring, eating and lazily watching the sparkles playing here and there upon the blue estuary before me, a small boat was rowed to the shore at the foot of the meadow, and its single occupant landed and looked about him.

He seemed a stranger to the place, but presently found a path and came up the slope into the road. There he hesitated again, looking first north then south along the road. As he stood irresolute his eye fell upon me. He seemed startled by my presence, but after a moment spent in apparent mental debate, he advanced slowly to the spot where I was sitting. As he came forward my eye dwelt upon him with interest. He was an elderly man, tall, somewhat bent, and clad in common dress. He had a well-shaped face, whitened with a short gray beard, and from under shaggy brows a pair of haunting eyes looked out, gray, mild, but furtive and uneasy. What his trade might be, or the habits of his life, I could not gather from his aspect, further than that his air had a certain subtle flavor of pathos, distance, travel and unrest.

When he had come near he addressed me respectfully, even with a touch of timidity. I do not know why I pitied him, for he did not seem distressed, at least not in grievous need. Perhaps it was for that indefinable touch of sadness which hung about him. Whatever the cause, I know I at once felt generously toward him, and asked him if he would not share the fruit with me. He thanked me, and after drinking at the spring, took some of the fruit in his hand and sat down at a little distance from me. He ate of the sweet stuff forgetfully, glancing at me curiously, at the little house, and out to sea.

"You are a stranger to the immediate region?" I said, interrogatively.

"Yes; I do not know it well," he replied, still looking about him. His language was good, but he had a dry, tired sort of voice. After a moment of apparent hesitation he spoke again. "Do you know if there is a hous , or place, called the Magnolias in this quarter?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I said, "that lies some twelve or fifteen miles farther along the road to the south. It is my home, though I have not seen it for five years now."

His eyes dilated visibly, and he strained them upon my face for a moment in silence. The ashen hue of his countenance altered slightly; it seemed to become grayer. "The name—it is—it is Stanwood, I believe?" he said, and suddenly got to his feet.

"Yes, sir, that is the name," I replied. "My own name is Francis Stanwood; I am the son of Doctor Stanwood of Magnolia Place."

A curious note of surprise, anger, or fear came from his throat. I could not determine the nature of the emotion prompting the sound, for the word, if it was a word, was dry and rattling, as from a larynx of tin. Suddenly he lifted his staring eyes from my face, turned without a word, and walked off swiftly toward the south.

I could not be honest and pretend that I was not surprised and mystified by this, even vaguely disturbed. As I lay cogitating, it occurred to me, however, that most probably this stranger was afflicted with some disease, possibly some ailment affecting the mind, and having heard of my father's skill was hastening to consult him. For a half hour longer I lay resting, then rose, drank of the spring and passed onward.

Near sunset I climbed the last low hill, and from its top, with a thrill, looked down upon Magnolia Place. It was a long shallow valley, trending from northeast to southwest, and throughout its green length wound the Traloume River, bringing the waters from a dozen far off inland lakes to issue them into the Gulf. Ten miles to the southwest the land melted almost imperceptibly into the sea; beyond that were islands, lying green and low upon the azure levels, like vast lily-pads floating in a medium half blue water and half the changing, hazy substance of a dream.

Everywhere there were beautiful trees. Upon my right the road followed the valley toward the sea, upon my left it fell downward through shade, crossed the river by a long bridge, and thence skirted the foot of the faint hills to Punta Rassa, forty miles away. A half mile beyond the bridge stood the house, almost palatial in size; back of it a shining grove of magnolias; before it, and to the right and left, lawn and gardens of flowers. Beyond the road to the southward were fields and meadows, above the house orchards, out-buildings and the quarters of the colored folk.

I had seen it all a thousand times before that fatal evening, yet not once had it seemed to lovely. My heart leaped in my bosom as my eyes swept over it again. Yet it is not in me to impart the strange foreboding which fell upon me after that first rush of joyous feeling. My spirit was as a well of clear and dancing water suddenly stopped by a cloud from the light of Heaven.

I turned aside weakly and sat down under a tree and looked long and hungrily toward the house. I felt myself upon the threshold of disaster, of disappointment so appalling I dared not confess its character to my own soul. I know not why, but as I sat there a strangely pregnant passage from a book I once read filtered slowly through my mind. It ran:

"In every man's life there comes an hour which, not unlike a black or golden numeral in a long train of ciphers, stands out heavy with the invisible future. Looking back at last we see that hour distinct as a ship's spar thrust up into the dawn, and how it shot a shadow or a beam of light through all the bubble-hours that one by one rose after it."

The words were as an emanation, sad, presageful, rising out of my heart. If my mother still lived, why did I not hasten onward to her? I had come more than a thousand miles in eagerness, through all the journey nursing as the very kernel of expectation a picture of her sitting upon the gallery as I last beheld her, and now, when the very spot where she should sit was all but in sight, anticipation faltered, wavering to earth like some bright bird with an arrow-shattered wing.

As I sat brooding and secretly fearful, the stranger whom I met by the spring in the orchard on the way, came slowly up the hill out of the long forest I had just traversed. Obviously I had somehow passed him on the way. He seemed weary and inert, much as one might who half despairs of finding the thing

MY SHIPS.

By Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

If all the ships I have at sea
Should come a-sailing home to me—
Weighed down with gems and silk and gold,
Ah, well, the harbor could not hold
So many sails as there would be
If all my ships came in from sea.

If just one ship I have at sea
Should come a-sailing home to me—
Ah, well, the storm-clouds then might frown,
For if the others all went down,
Still rich and proud and glad I'd be
If that one ship came home to me.

Oh, skies, be calm! Oh, winds, blow free,
Blow all my ships safe home to me!
But if thou sendest some a-wrack,
To nevermore come sailing back,
Send any, all, that skim the sea,
But bring my love-ship home to me.

he seeks, but when his eye dropped into the valley of the Magnolias, and swept over all that lay there, he became excited and rubbed his forehead like one waking from a dream. So acute was his preoccupation he did not mark me where I sat under the tree. For a little space he stood, apparently weighing and balancing questions and impulses that were not easy of answer or control, then, to my surprise, he turned off down the road to the right, as if he would make the little port of Garcia on Charlotte Bay.

For a half hour longer I sat in silence, gloomily watching the shadows of evening creep over the scene; the veil of grayish violet and the deadening film of dusk settling upon the great picture like an impalpable ash.

At last I felt that I could delay no longer, and arising, passed down the road among the trees and came upon the bridge. Half way across the structure I paused again, and leaning against the rail, looked down at the water. The tide was running out, the current, aided by the spring rains inland, was fluxing swiftly forward, carrying here and there a log or some other piece of wreckage seaward.

The bridge was more than a hundred feet in length, imposed upon high cypress cribs filled with stones, with long king-post trusses set upon either side along its floor. Covering the short spaces between the ends of these trusses ran low railings, and it was at one of these I was standing. Many times in boyhood I had stood at the selfsame spot and cast the cheating lure upon the waters. Here I had often lain when yet too young for serious angling, and watched, when the water was clear, the fish going inland from the sea, wavering against the tide like limber beams of light.

Now, as I stood looking down upon the flood, a horseman rode upon the bridge from the west, going toward Magnolia House. The light was waning fast, but before he reached me I saw with a chill throb of my pulses that the horseman was my father. Not until his horse had come abreast of me did he note my presence. Then with a smothered exclamation of surprise he reined in the animal and looked sharply at me. A great displeasure seemed to sweep over him; at least a frown which was hateful to see suddenly clouded his face. The frown he instantly swept away with a visible effort, and springing down from the horse, extended his hand with a phrase of greeting. I took it and returned the greeting, looking eagerly into his face.

It was the same faultless face, smooth-shaven, classic, and hard to me in its expression. He was finely attired in a conventional riding suit. The light was too dim for me to determine if his curling hair yet contained any threads of gray, or if time's graver had left any traces of its work upon his face. Of two things, however, I was instantly conscious—the delicate perfume I always associated with his person, and that I now was as tall as he.

As our hands dropped apart, he stood and looked at me a moment, and I saw the frown come into his face again.

"Why did you come back?" he said bluntly. "You were not expected."

The insult went through me like a knife. I had come during the five years of my absence to look upon myself as a man, and with the pride that manhood brings, I resented any want of courtliness in other men. And why should I not come home? I had no other home but this, harsh and cold as its atmosphere had often been for me! Here at least my mother dwelt, why should I not come to her without a brutal flout? As these thoughts stung their way through my mind I stood and looked him in the eye.

"I came to see my mother," I said at last through my teeth. "Was it not possible that I should visit her without this insult from her husband? I decline to address you as my father!"

He moved aside a pace or two then stepped close before me, an evil glitter in his eye, a thread of bravado in his voice that cut into me like a scorching whip.

"Your mother is dead," he said. "She died three months ago."

"Oh!" I cried. "Oh, my God! my God!" and I only know that I caught at my heart and throat and reeled against the railing and hung there, blind and dizzy with the blow.

I could not see him for a moment; the bridge seemed to rise and fall beneath me as if it were some fantastic, feathery structure lying upon the wind. When I saw him clearly I stood gasping. He stood with his hands behind him, the bridle rein in his fingers, noting my anguish with a sardonic smile.

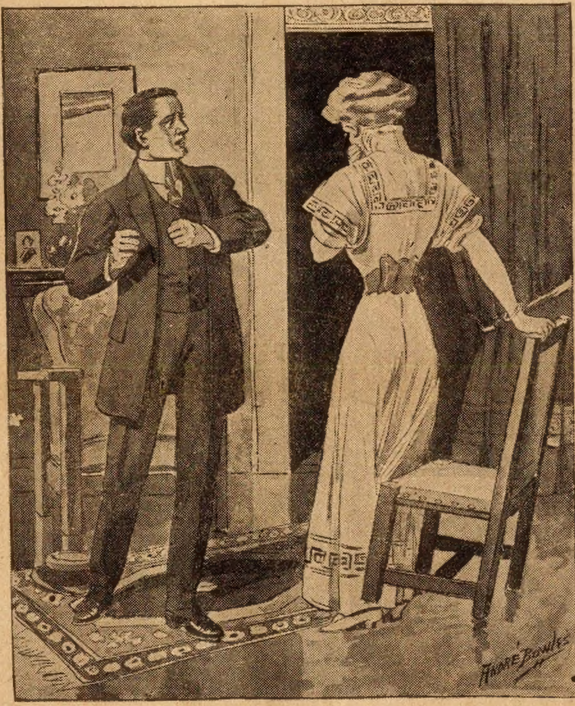
"Why did you not write me of this?" I demanded, and with my words the wild sorrow in me burst into such a flame of anger as I pray Heaven may never scorch my soul again.

"It would have brought you only the sooner to this silly exhibition," he sneered, and made a movement of repugnance as if to go.

Instantly I struck him, and he measured his length upon the floor of the bridge. A thousand times I regretted that frightful blow. But it seemed to me then that no fiend from perdition could have more cruelly thrust a great and fearful sorrow upon me.

For a moment he lay still, then slowly got to his feet and stood silently steadying himself by the rail. He wiped some blood from his face and looked at it upon his hand. Then he turned his eyes upon my face; they glowed out of the dusk like the eyes of a tiger. I stood still, a prickling fire running along my every nerve. He looked down the river for a moment, then back to my face, and then like lightning he sprang upon me. I met him with a quick blow upon the breast and flung him off, but in another second of time he was at my throat again. Again I struck him and threw him away from me, but he came again like a whirlwind. At that we grappled and struggled silently. I felt he would tear me in pieces in the wild energy of his frenzy and power. His face in the twilight close to mine looked the visage of a demon, distorted, white, and trickling blood. He seemed possessed of but one purpose, to strangle and hurl me headlong from the bridge into the shadowy flood below.

As the moments passed we fought into the middle of the bridge, then across it to the southern rail. Here he secured a deadly clutch upon my throat, and as we struggled wildly against the rail it creaked and strained as if it would part asunder and let us into the stream, and with a sudden supreme throe of terror I tore him away and whirled him into the center of the road again. There he paused an instant, then suddenly drew a pistol from his pocket and cocked it.



"I am your father's wife."

"Dog!" he cried wildly. "I will kill you now, as I should have done long ago!"

But almost before the frightful sentence had finished its passage from his lips, I hurled him backward, and we fell together under the truss at the northern side of the bridge. The blow, the plunge, and the fall were dizzying in their effect, and for a moment we lay half stunned, but grappling each other as with the last instinct of madness.

Through all the struggle I had not uttered a word. All the wrong he had ever done me, pent up in my heart for long like a cyst of gall, seemed burst and flying through my veins.

As we lay there close upon the edge of the bridge he seemed the first to recover from the shock of the fall. My head had struck the king-post of the truss, I think, as we went down and the blow had dazed me; but even through the haze that was gathering in my mind ran the instinct of self-preservation, and I clutched wildly at the cocked pistol.

Suddenly he turned me, but in that instant I caught the barrel of the weapon in my right hand, and as we struggled to our feet I wrenched it from him, and turned the muzzle toward him. I know not if I intended to kill him; of the turmoil, and fury, and haste of that last moment little of my own sensations remain that are intelligible and clear to me. I only know that ere we had drawn another breath he struck me, the pistol exploded, and in the whistling white smoke that shot from the muzzle I saw a gush of blood leap from his neck close to his chin, and he fell backward, and I was left in the gathering darkness standing alone upon the bridge.

CHAPTER II.

I stood for a moment benumbed by the enormity of the thing I had done. Then, panting and distraught, I leaped to the edge of the bridge and looked down. Nothing was visible save the dark flood sweeping under me. I leaped away to the southern side of the structure and strained my eyes downward. Suddenly a white face shot up out of the water twenty or thirty feet below the bridge. Then for the first time I cried out. I have no memory of what I said, but I doubtless cried to the Creator for succor, as all those fashionned in His image do when life's chances narrow to despair.

As I looked, the face, vague and fading in the crepuscular gloom, sank into the hurrying waters, and, with another cry of terror, I turned and saw the mysterious stranger standing by me, the bridle-rein of my father's horse in his hand.

Before his lips could finish the words that stirred them, I fled along the structure to the eastern shore, leaped to the ground from the high approach, and ran to the water's edge a hundred feet below the bridge. I peered out upon the waters but could distinguish nothing; I ran up and down the shore, suffering, mad with desire to undo my deed. Then I flung my clothing from me and sprang into the flood. Reared by the river, and with the bay and bayous always before me, I had sported in the water from childhood. That night I took the water with such strokes as made all my remembered efforts seem feeble. I swam a thousand feet below the bridge, then back again, and to and fro, and calling always. But all was silent, save the soft breathing of the trees and the gurgle and rush of waters.

"He is dead!" I confessed at last with sickening soul. "He has gone to the bottom! I am a murderer! O, God! O, God!"

My feet touched the bottom near the shore, and I drew myself out upon the bank and sat there, trembling from head to foot. The stars, swarming into the sky, were dropping their restless images upon the waters, and I looked up to them as to the accusing face of God. Their silence and their solemn majesty appalled me, and I arose, with such a heart as only one who is compassionate, and yet has taken human life, may know, and finding my scattered garments put them on. Then I went back to the bridge, staggering like a drunken man, and with the dead heaviness of lead in every fiber of my frame.

As I came below the bridge I looked up and saw against the stars the stranger and my father's horse standing where I had left them. As yet no thought of escape or personal safety had touched my mind; nor did it then; I was stunned, appalled, and deep in my heart too busy with the monstrous fact of my soul's disaster to think upon my situation.

I went upon the bridge and walked along it to where the stranger stood. There was a wild glow in his eyes, and an air about him of triumphant elation.

"I heard and saw it all!" he said huskily. "You did it nobly, manfully! He deserved the fate you dealt out to him. Your secret is safe with me! Do not fear; it is safe!"

He picked up the pistol from the floor of the bridge and flung it into the stream, and turning mounted the horse.

"I will see that this animal does not appear against you as evidence," he said. "You did right; be happy; don't fear. Good-by!" And he struck the horse with his hand, and they sped off the bridge westward, and as I stood there dumfounded with his act and dazed with that which had befallen me, I heard the galloping hoofs go over the hill and the sound of them die away in the long forest through which I had come so jocundly that afternoon.

I groaned. In sheer bewilderment of anguish I turned and walked blindly toward Magnolia House. What I should say, what I should do, or whom I should find there I did not consider. I was driven as with a whip of fire.

When I came to the gate I looked up and saw, as on that other holy eve, the same enormous moon lifting its face above the hills to the eastward, fretted with tree-branches like jet tracery winding about a globe of gold! I turned my eyes to the house; the lower rooms were aglow with light, breaking out across the long gallery where my mother and I had sat so many times! As I looked a suffocating ache grew in my throat, and a dry, burning wretchedness spread through all my being.

I went in through the gate and along the graveled walk to the gallery and sat down upon its edge, in the self-same place where she had blessed and adjured me to practice the law of kindness! Ah, God pity me, but how the thought wrung me now!

As I sat there with my head hanging down, and every breath a labored throe of suffering, there rose a low music in the northern quarter of the house, a delicate, tender, tinkling melody, struck from an instrument to which my ears were all unused. The flavor of it was exceedingly ariose and sweet, and sank into me like rain into parching ground.

After the first soft prelude had fallen away, a human voice joined the music of the strings. It was a low voice, crystal clear, and the song ran on like a rivulet, with many breaks and pauses, as if no ear heard save the singer's and her heart were far away. It was of a lonesome quality, like the singing of a robin in twilight rain, and for a time it was to my heart like a hand pressed upon a wound, then suddenly the dry seals broke from the fountain of my spirit and I wept.

For a half hour I sat there. My breast labored and my heart felt constricted as if with a strangling cord, yet I could not wish the melody to cease.

At last the singer tired, the mesh of ensnaring sounds melted like a golden vapor, and I came out of it to the cold, harrowing truth of my position. Feet came lightly through the room, a silken rustling with them, and into the glow of the doorway merged the slender figure of a girl. A little cry of fright escaped her lips at sight of me, and I arose, striving with all my power to clear my features of the distorting anguish that I felt reflected there.

"Good evening, sir," she said, drawing back as the light fell against my haggard face. "Did you wish to see Doctor Stanwood?"

For a moment I could not speak, her words struck me so like a blow.

"I am Doctor Stanwood's son," I said unsteadily. "I am Francis Stanwood."

The young woman fetched a gasp of surprise. She drew back into the room with her eyes upon my face. Will you enter?" she said.

As I crossed the threshold, she put out her hand to me.

"I—I—I had not thought to see you," she said. "Will you let me welcome you home? I am your father's wife." There was a confused look in her face. She was very beautiful.

I did not take her hand, but drew back and stared at her in sheer amazement. For the moment all that agonized me, together with the power of common courtesy, went from me in wonder of this strange intelligence. Then suddenly the thing was no longer a marvel to me; its staggering impossibility dwindled and was swallowed up in that far vaster amazement and horror in which I was buried as in a cloud.

I took her hand mechanically and stammered a sentence of commonplace, of congratulation, I know not what, then started away with some instinctive, half-formed notion of going up to the chamber I used to occupy. Suddenly remembering the oddity of this action I turned about and sat down upon a chair and stared at her.

The lady's cheeks were flushed, and she went out of the room a moment, clearly to master her embarrassment. It was the reception room in which I sat, and I looked about me in a dumb, vague way, dimly conscious of newness and change in the familiar place. It seemed more richly appointed than before. Yet through all my wonder throbbed the horrors of that hour up on the bridge, fro[illegible]ery picture upon the walls seemed a white face floating away in water.

When the lady entered a moment later I started involuntarily. She went to the door and looked out, and stood an instant listening, then turned and came toward me.

"I am expecting your father home at any moment," she said. "He went, I think, to Port Garcia. Would you like to go to your room before we have tea? Your father's man will show you the way, though no doubt you know the house better than he."

I bowed and thanked her; a black young fellow, immaculate of face and linen, came in with a lamp, and I followed him up the broad softly-carpeted stair to the floor above. The servant was not one that I had known before, and in the hall, without words, I took the lamp from his hand and passed into the room I knew so well. It, too, had been newly treated by the decorator, and of the furniture I had known when at home in my boyhood only the bed remained.

Then all had not changed! One object remained! One inanimate thing that had known my mother's care, and had been a portion of the world when I was innocent! I flung myself down upon it and prayed for death. As I lay tossing, presently a hand tapped on the door. I arose and opened it. The colored man was there. His eyes were wide and he spoke to me much as one might speak to a ghost.

"De Mistis wishes dat de ge'man would come down if he's ready," he said, shrinking back perceptibly and twisting his hands together before him as he bowed. No doubt there was that in my face which would have startled a mind even less simple than his.

I bowed and shut the door, and finding water and towels in the room made such use of them as my agitation would allow. When I had finished I descended the stair. The colored man was at its foot and led me into the dining hall. The lady was there, and coming forward, seated me at the table with a gracious air. Here, in this room, much was changed and new, and far finer than in the old time.

After the first glance I sat staring at my plate. It has been said that all ecstacies, either of pain or pleasure, work injury to the human mind and body. I know that the storm of rage which had swept over me, followed by a frenzy of remorse, had left me weak and incapable.

Across the snowy table from me sat the lady and poured the tea, and I took a few tasteless mouthfuls of food.

"I thought we had best not wait for your father," I heard her saying. Her voice had a silvery, persuasive, comforting note. "It is growing rather late for tea," she went on. "He may not return tonight; doubtless he was unexpectedly detained at the Port. Possibly some surgical operation kept him, or may be the serious sickness of some one."

Oh, lying, awful silence that hung in my throat! How could I answer her? My tongue made a dry sort of noise and I stared at my plate. But I saw nothing there, only a white face floating upon dark water, a bruised body drifting out to sea. I turned helplessly to her face; it was bright, engaging, yet with a questioning pity in the starry eyes. I looked at the spotless table, at the chair by it where he should be sitting now, and the whole seemed to sway like something filmy and unreal. I felt again that sudden awful desolation which encompassed me upon the bridge, and I held fast the table edge in an effort to keep from crying out, as one might who feels himself sinking into a dark gulf beyond all human succor. I mastered the impulse finally with a gasp. The lady regarded me with a frightened stare.

"You must pardon me," I stammered, "I—I—it moves me strongly to sit here where she used to sit! It was another face than—than yours I thought to see! I did not know until this evening that my mother was dead!"

My eyes grew wet with these first spoken words that approached my unspeakable bereavement. They seemed to reach, for the moment, into the darkness and bring me within human touch. Glimmeringly I saw her through my tears.

"I thought he had written to you weeks ago, telling you of it all," I heard her saying, in a confused, pleading way. "I—I—oh, believe me, I am very unhappy that it is so!"

I closed my teeth hard, straining to master the tempest that beset me. We sat a moment in silence.

"If you will pardon me," I stammered again, "but I believe I cannot eat more. If you will permit me I will go to my room."

I arose and passed out, leaving her sitting in silence. In my room I paced up and own, painfully revolving my position. An hour dragged slowly by, though I had small realization of time; another came and went; still I paced round and round and to and fro. My feet went as the promptings in my breast, confused, aimless, purposeless, all system of plan and intention wrecked.

I laid down upon the bed in my clothing and tried to reflect, only to rise and pace up and down again.

At last, all but mad, I opened one of the windows, which were but glass doors on hinges, and stepped out upon the gallery. A soft wind from the Gulf fell against my burning forehead like a cooling hand. The moon, drawing toward the zenith, was slicing its way through a field of scud like a coulter of pearl; upon the orchard leaves, and running everywhere about the fields, were faint white flickerings.

Finding the gallery stair I descended hurriedly, brushed my way out through dew-globules and blossoming shrubs, leaped over the garden wall, and hastened up the road. I did not turn toward the bridge but took the road toward the north. I had no definite calculation of time or place or distance. I went as one flying from madness, prompted by nature to evaporate frenzy in action.

At length I found myself standing upon the margin of a stream, which a half mile away fell into the river. Hot, wretched, I flung off my clothing and leaped into the deepest pool. I buried my burning head in the cooling water, I drank of it thirstily, but it did not allay the oppressive heat in my breast and brain.

CHAPTER III.

As I hurried along the road that night, the moon lay over to the west, dropping slowly into clouds of silvery gauze. The houses of the colored folk north of the orchards looked small and vague, the fences by the wayside, and cattle couched in the meadows, were as filmy creations of a spectral world. Bordering on dementia, as I was, the landscape looked fantastic, eerie, and unreal. I seemed as some lost soul hunting for peace and innocence in a planet where all was fashioned of cheating shadow.

As I came by the house I saw the light in my chamber windows, and another paler glow in a room at the north end of the mansion. The sight brought me back to earth again. It gave me a fresh sense of my great sin and quickened the tumult in my breast. I hastened on down the road leading to Punta Rassa. A half mile or more from the house I came to the mouth of a little lane, which, turning to the left, climbed to a graveyard on a gentle knoll. Here were a few mounds among the trees, and, near the center of the sacred plot, a tomb of brick and marble, with smooth stone steps leading down through an iron doorway to a crypt. My father had caused it to be erected years before, and here all that was mortal of my mother slept, folded in holy silence.

As I ascended the lane through the dwindling moonlight my feet began to falter. I felt, I fancy, as Cain may have, when, with murder's first red blot upon his brow, he sought the portal of his mother's dwelling-place.

Slowly I came to the locked gate. I could not bear to even lay my hand upon the white fence which divided the consecrated ground from the outer world. I stood on the outside and looked through streaming tears toward the dim, peaceful little dwelling where she slept. God pity any one who may ever come to a mother's grave bearing upon his heart such freight as mine! I was not worthy to enter the enclosure where she lay! My sin lay upon me like a world; had a mountain fallen upon me it had not more surely crushed me to the ground.

What passed between me and the power that all men feel and grope for when broken upon the wheel of sorrow, is not to be written here. Words may not convey it; besides, there are exposures of the soul, epochs of moral nudity and expiation before the Creator, which man instinctively covers from his fellows with a veil of silence.

Yet I came from that awful hour of travail weak and uncomforted. When in the passion of my suffering I arose at last and kissed the gate through which her dear body had been borne, and turned away and went stumbling down the lonely lane, a sense of the enormity of my deed, and the immovable burden of it, remained.

But nature in me was failing. I seemed as grain which has been beaten flat with storm and has no strength to rise. I felt in my limbs the growing inertia of the clod. When I had reached the house I dragged myself up the gallery stair, and entering my chamber, fell upon the bed and sank ere long into a cold, dim condition, a sleep that did not seem as sleep but as a submerged, phantasmal state of consciousness bordering on death.

Out of this sunken region of vapor and faint things I started at last with a cry. Something white and ghostlike seemed creeping in through the window. It was the gray light of dawn and a fresh horror of myself swept suddenly over me. I sprang up and rushed to the window, in my dazed brain a blind eagerness to undo in some way the hideous thing I had done. Away to the east the sun swam in a sullen sea of froth. I saw it, as many times in other years, far and low down among the trees like a globe of burning sulphur. I looked at it a moment and groaned as I realized my helplessness.

Yet, even with the recognized futility of my desire, came a mastering impulse to see the spot where destiny had overthrown me. I crept stealthily down and out upon the road and hurried to the bridge. The waters slid swiftly between the piers, gurgling onward to the sea as in the spring-time floods of old. There were faint tongues of purple in the sky. The thin dust upon the floor of the bridge looked scuffed and damp. For the first time I thought of the little package of linen I had carried with me from Punta Gorda. Doubtless it had fallen into the water in my struggle with my father and had been carried away.

I turned down the stream and followed it for more than a mile, hurrying along and scanning the waters hungerly, yet in an agony of fear least I should find the awful thing I sought. By times I paused and held my breath to listen for I knew not what, then suddenly broke out panting, and hurried on.

The atmosphere was yet vague and of a misty gray along that low, shaded ground, and the bearded live-oaks stood in it like dead monsters.

As I rushed along a vision of morning on the high prairies of Iowa swept through my mind, the vast oval of the earth's breast, heaped in long waves and green as the middle sea, the wide indescribable amplitude of light, and the glory and wholesome wholeness of life; then, as swiftly, a picture of the streets of the great city by the northern lake flashed after it; yet all the time I seemed thinking solely of that grewsome thing I sought but did not wish to see.

At last with a sudden wrench and revulsion I stopped. A great dome of dull flame was swelling upward in the east, its outline visible through the trees like a distant mountain of brass, and I turned and passed out of the shadows eastward into open ground. An oriole with blood-red breast flew out of the wood above me and plunged into the greenery again. It shook me strangely. Ah, that haunting spot of red in the twilight! I shuddered with the memory.

As I crossed the meadows frightened larks sprang out of the grass, and recumbent cattle got to their feet and gazed at me with wide, startled eyes. When I struck the road running north I followed it slowly to the house. Weariness and despair were fallen again upon me. I could not bear to look toward the graves upon the knoll as I passed below them; life in me was too inexpressibly dark and bitter.

Should I confess to the young wife? O, terrible thought! I recoiled before it. Yet, should I not expiate the enormous fault? Did not manhood in me demand it? Was I utterly blamable? Yes, I had struck the first blow, and in the end had proved the stronger, and had killed him! Oh, my God!

Thus the theme beat through my brain. Suddenly a bell tinkled silverly through the house. It was the call to breakfast. Then I must meet her again! My heart throbbed afresh. In my overmastering concern for self I had scarcely thought of her, so lately my father's bride, now, by my hand, a widow. How could I sit in her presence! How bear the light of her eyes! Yet all must be borne. I bathed my face and cleansed myself, and went down, lingering with dread upon every step.

When I entered the dining hall she was there, standing by the window. At sound of my feet she turned and greeted me pleasantly, yet with a touch of timidity in her air, as one who would mend an offense, as one craving to be understood. As she stepped toward me with extended hand, I noted how lithe and delicately she was fashioned, how rich a wealth of light brown hair clustered about her small, queenly head, how large and limpid her hazel eyes, and how native and pervading her atmosphere of sweet gentility. Though seemingly unconscious of it, she carried herself with the indefinable nicety of a bird. She seemed grown but little beyond childhood; not more than seventeen or eighteen years of age; yet, somehow, to me, saving my blessed mother, she seemed womanly beyond any one I had ever met.

I had been dimly aware of her beauty as a whole when I first beheld her, but being freshly sunken in the gravest strait which may befall a man, no detail of her comeliness had made itself plain to me. Now, as she held my hand a moment, looking into my face with a swift sympathy for my obvious wretchedness, I felt something of the horror of my position slip for the instant from me.

"I fear you have not rested well," she said, with that velvet soothing in her voice which pity alone can give. "I scarcely slept for thinking of you. Believe me, I am very, very unhappy that you were treated so."

I was conscious that my lip trembled as I faltered a word of thanks, and when we were seated at table I tried to eat, keeping silent in the main, for I knew not what to say. A young mulatto girl, daintily dressed, stood ready to serve us, but soon after we were seated the slender mistress dismissed her with a look. A sort of brass samovar, polished and quaintly wrought, stood near the lady's right hand. From this she poured coffee, saying that since her husband had remained away over night, he doubtless would not now return until evening.

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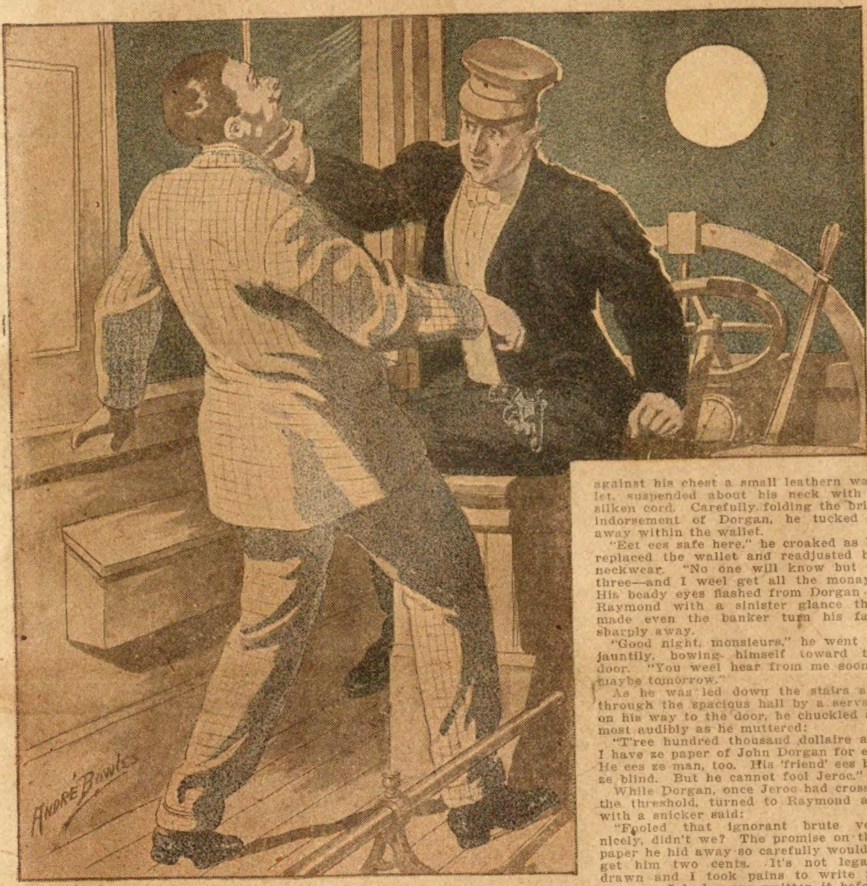

The mechanician crumbled like a frost bitten flower.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE BARGAIN SEALED.

AT THE door on his way out, Jeroc suddenly paused, turned and looked at Raymond in a puzzled way.

"But, say, monsieur," he began disjointedly, "ain't thees fool business? How do I know who you are? Ze only name I know for you eet ze 'friend!' What a joke eet ez to laugh," and the mechanician ended with a brassy croak.

"Oh, I think we can fix that all right," responded the secretary haltingly. "Just wait here a moment and I'll see if I can't satisfy you that my promise is good."

Jeroc watched Raymond disappear behind the tapestries. With a crafty twinkle in his screened eyes, he cocked his ear to catch any sound that might issue from behind those close-held hangings. He thought he detected the pat of four instead of two feet upon the carpet. He believed he heard a sharp, sibillant whisper. But he knew he heard a heavy door open and shut. Then the tapestries were impatiently thrust aside and the man with whom he had talked at the aviation field earlier in the day advanced into the library. Behind him came Raymond with head bent like a rebuked dog following its master.

John Dorgan looked anything but pleased. He lighted a heavy black cigar before he spoke. After a puff or two, he turned to Jeroc and nodded coldly.

"Mr. Raymond here," he began jerking his head in the direction of the secretary, "tells me he has been making some proposition to you and that you want to know about him. You can be sure he can carry out anything he promises."

"But," Jeroc spread his palms outward with a deprecatory gesture, "how shall I know? You call him 'friend' and he call heemself nothing at all to me. He say eef I do hees job good, eet weel be ze three hundred thousand dollaire for me. But from where? From heem? Weel, who ees heem?" and the gesticulating Frenchman extended his arm belligerently toward the banker's assistant.

"I tell you that anything he promises to do, I'll see that he carries out," insisted the financier, dropping emphatically into an easy chair.

"So?" queried Jeroc with his slant brow corrugated with wrinkles. "And what may ze gentleman himself be?"

"That makes no difference," said Dorgan impatiently. Then he set pen to paper, Raymond meanwhile looking on like an interloper. Not an expression in the scene escaped the sharp-eyed mechanician.

The banker in a moment handed over to Jeroc a note. The latter looked at it, turned over the sheet and then turned it back.

"What does eet read?" he asked. "Your Eenglish ees too much for ze Frenchman like me."

In obedience to Dorgan's nod, Raymond took the sheet and read:

"I hereby agree to fulfill the agreement Henry Raymond has made.
"JOHN DORGAN."

"John Dorgan? Dorgan, zee beeg bankaire of Wall Street?" piped Jeroc in surprise that stretched his mouth and bulged his eyes.

"The same," nodded the financier curtly."

"Ah, well, that ees different. Your name, monsieur, ees worth very much. Millions, maybe, eh?"

"Yes, maybe," Dorgan grinned.

"Then I weel keep my promise for I am sure of my monay."

Whereupon Jeroc loosened collar and shirt and drew from its hiding place against his chest a small leathern wallet, suspended about his neck with a silken cord. Carefully folding the brief indorsement of Dorgan, he tucked it away within the wallet.

"Eet ees safe here," he croaked as he replaced the wallet and readjusted his neckwear. "No one will know but us three—and I weel get all the monay." His beady eyes flashed from Dorgan to Raymond with a sinister glance that made even the banker turn his face sharply away.

"Good night, monsieurs," he went on jauntily, bowing himself toward the door. "You weel hear from me soon—maybe tomorrow."

As he was led down the stairs and through the spacious hall by a servant on his way to the door, he chuckled almost audibly as he muttered:

"T'ree hundred thousand dollaire and I have ze paper of John Dorgan for eet. He ees ze man, too. His 'friend' ees but ze blind. But he cannot fool Jeroc."

While Dorgan, once Jeroc had crossed the threshold, turned to Raymond and with a snicker said:

"Fooled that ignorant brute very nicely, didn't we? The promise on that paper he hid away so carefully wouldn't get him two cents. It's not legally drawn and I took pains to write my name as I had never written it before. Not a man who has ever seen my signature would recognize the scrawl I put to that sheet."

"That's right," coincided the secretary. "I had some difficulty in making myself believe it was yours. If I had not seen you write it, I would have put it down for a clumsy forgery."

"So," went on Dorgan with his shaggy eyebrows hiding his crafty glance, "if he ever threatens to make any trouble for us with it, we can put him inside prison bars with a forgery charge. There's two of us against him, Raymond, two of us. And the word of no alien aero crank would stand long against that of Dorgan, the banker, and his unsullied secretary, eh, Raymond?" and the man of millions took a long whiff at his cigar and smiled complacently.

CHAPTER XVI.

VIRGINIA'S STRATEGY.

But the next afternoon John Dorgan ran into another experience that tested his craft far more than his interview with Jeroc. In the midst of the details of an intricate financial problem, Raymond announced Miss Virginia Larned.

"Show her in at once, of course," instructed the banker.

Virginia came in with a pretty pout.

"What does this mean, Guardy?" she asked with a roguish twinkle. "You never barred me out before. Raymond actually made me wait until he'd taken in my name."

"Well, I am in the midst of a very difficult problem," the banker answered hesitantly, "and I dislike to be disturbed. But why this call? The last time you were her, you remember, you left in something of a huff."

"Just one of my foolish freaks," the girl smiled apologetically. She came quite close to the old man's desk and leaned over so that she could look enticingly into his somber eyes. "But I've come to ask another favor," she went on diffidently.

The banker's aloofness melted under

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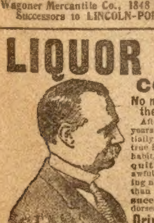

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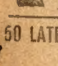

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the diffident glances of the girl's alluring eyes.

"Well, child," he said, thrusting his great hand gently over her daintily gloved one as it lay at the edge of his desk, "if it's within reason, you shall have it granted."

"Well, you see, Guardy, it's like this," Virginia went on hesitatingly. "The Meadowbrook Hunt Club is to hold its summer soiree at 'The Nockery' next week. As hostess I'm anxious to have it go off splendidly. I just want to make it a greater success than the club has ever had before. But it takes money to do it—and I haven't got enough—unless you'll advance me some of my allowance."

"How much do you want?"

"Oh, a thousand dollars or so."

John Dorgan cleared his throat.

"All right girl," he said, "but don't spend it extravagantly. You are already overdrawn, you know."

"It does seem so hard to keep within my allowance," Virginia sighed with a well-feigned languishing look at her guardian.

The banker touched an electric bell beneath his desk. Raymond appeared almost instantly.

"Have a check for one thousand dollars drawn for Miss Larned," the financier instructed, "and charge it to her account."

The secretary turned to go but Dorgan stopped him with a lift of the hand.

"And have another check for a thousand drawn to her credit and charge to my account," the banker announced.

"And pray, what's that second check for?" inquired Virginia when Raymond retired.

"My gift toward the success of your Hunt Club soiree," said the banker softly.

"Oh, Guardy, how good of you," exclaimed Virginia. Then she went on much embarrassed: "But there's still another favor I want to ask of you."

With a little spring she settled herself on the arm of his chair. One dainty hand rested softly on his broad shoulder. It was like the caress of a dove upon the shaggy neck of a blustering lion.

The stern lines in the banker's iron face softened a trifle under the girl's caress.

"Well, you little coaxer," he smiled, "what is it now?"

"It's just like this, Guardy," she explained. "The affair is to wind up in the evening with a dance. The girls intend to appear their loveliest. Corra Scrymgeour tells us she's going to wear her great Durbar diamond."

From the corners of her partly closed eyes Virginia cast a searching look down at her guardian. The clever maneuver she was attempting made her heart thump so vigorously that she feared the somber man she was trying to match with craft would hear it.

Dorgan smoothed his open hand along his desk and fixed his eyes on the ceiling as if in study.

"Well?" was all he vouchsafed.

"Well, Guardy, don't you see," said the girl, letting her hand creep slowly about his neck, "it would hurt my feelings dreadfully if one of my guests were to outshine me with her display of jewels."

"Haven't you plenty of jewels of your own?"

"Yes, but not a diamond that can compare with Corra's Durbar."

"Well?"

"You see, Guardy," the girl's hand softly smoothed the shoulder of the banker, "I had an idea that from all your collection of diamonds you might have one that would outshine Corra's." Virginia's breath came so fast as she developed her strategy to the critical point that she feared her guardian could not fail to notice her excitement.

If he did, he attributed it to some other cause, for after a moment's reflection, he uplifted his face and smiled at the girl.

"I haven't a diamond in my collection to equal the Durbar," he said regretfully. "I tried to buy it when it came on the market years ago, but Corra's father was able to get to the seller first."

"And you really can't help me out?" Virginia asked in feigned dismay, dropping off her pretty perch and retreating a step.

"I'm afraid not." Dorgan put out his hand as if to detain her but she eluded him.

"Then I think you're very disappointing, after all," she cried, pouting delightfully.

The banker, under the thrall of the girl's charming face and enticing manner, felt his iron will dissolve slowly. It would be such a satisfaction to bring back her glorious smile, the soft touch of her dainty hand. And if he pleased her now, in this great wish, it might reinstate him in her graces and help him to shelve this fellow Babcock after all. False to his crafty business judgment, he let his long-suppressed sentimental side dominate his action.

"Just a moment," he said. "You really want to wear a great diamond, do you?"

Virginia nodded, reviving hope giving her face a piquant touch.

"Then I'll trust you with one that nobody knows about," the banker said. "But you must keep its origin a secret."

Virginia opened wide her eyes. She knew she had gotten her guardian to the point she had planned. And she did not intend that her own clever acting should fail in the climax.

"Guardy," she panted at him with her hands clasped tightly in front of her bosom, "what are you going to do now?"

"Is that flying man Babcock to be at your soiree?" he asked abruptly, rising from his chair.

"Oh, no," the girl replied hastily, "he doesn't like these social functions at all."

"Humph," growled Dorgan, "guess he'd find himself misplaced." He caught hold of Virginia's sleeve and drew her toward his chair. "Now, you sit there," he went on, pushing the girl gently into his capacious seat. "And shut your eyes and keep them shut until I tell you to open them. Do you promise?"

"Yes, yes," answered Virginia, her heart bounding.

John Dorgan, still keeping an eye on the girl to observe that she kept her agreement, strode across the room to the picture behind which was hidden his secret compartment in the wall. He thrust aside the frame, snapped open the small door and drew forth a small package.

Closing the door and replacing the picture, he came back to Virginia's side. He opened the package and exposed the great, dazzling diamond that Professor Jekyll had brought to him. He set it down on the desk before his ward.

"Now, girl, look," he said, striving to keep his voice steady.

Virginia opened her eyes. Their first glance caught the glint of the massive gem.

"Oh, Guardy," she exclaimed rapturously, "wonderful, glorious. Where did you get it?"

"There you go, woman-like," he smiled, "asking questions. Never mind about them. But do you think that will outshine Miss Scrymgeour's Durbar?"

"Do I? Why, Corra's will look like a piece of paste alongside this. It's the most gorgeous stone I ever saw."

"Well, I'll let you wear it just this once. I'll have Tiffany set it for you immediately."

"Oh, no, let me have the setting done," the girl insisted, picking up the Jekyll stone. "I've got an idea I want followed."

"Well, be very careful of it," warned the banker.

"I surely will," responded Virginia significantly. She opened her gold-meshed purse and tucked the precious gem tightly within it.

"And now what thanks do I get?" the banker inquired, moving close to the girl. He meant at least a kiss. His ward sensed his meaning and retreated toward the door.

"Guardy," she said, turning suddenly to confront him, "do you think trickery, deceit is justifiable when it is used to right a wrong?"

The strangeness of the question brought him to a sharp stop in his pursuit of her. His stern face took on a puzzled look in which there was a trace of apprehension.

"Why, yes, girl," he replied lamely, "anything is justified when you are righting a wrong. But what a queer question."

"I'm glad you answered that way. It makes me feel better," Virginia said with a little sigh. "I wasn't sure I was doing right in tricking you, but I feel better now that you've justified me."

"Tricked me? How?" the banker demanded threateningly.

"You robbed old Professor Jekyll of this diamond," the girl braced herself defiantly. "You deceived him when you told him you had misplaced it. You nearly broke the heart of that dear old man of science. So I thought I'd get it back for him. The only way was to match cunning with your craft. And I've won." The girl who had been under tremendous strain throughout the interview now felt her grip on herself slipping. She laughed half-hysterically.

"You're a fool," the banker exclaimed, darting toward his ward and grasping her shoulder. "Give that back to me at once!"

With a dangerous gleam in her eyes, Virginia shook off his hand.

"Don't you dare touch me again," she flamed.

"But I want that stone back," he blurted. He raised his fist and poised it above her heand. "And, by heaven, I'll have it back."

Clasping the purse tightly against her bosom, she looked up at him, her eyes like glinting steel.

"Don't you dare, John Dorgan," she said steadily. "If you lay a finger on me again, I'll have you landed in the Tombs prison as a common thief."

And Virginia, turning haughtily, marched out of the office. Behind the closed door of her limousine which had been waiting for her, she pressed the Jekyll diamond against her cheek and burst into a fit of weeping.

CHAPTER XVII.

BUILDING THE SHIP.

Financially equipped through the medium of Virginia Larned's bank account and the proceeds of her pawned jewels, Lester Bacbock went feverishly forward with his aircraft plans. In a week the framework of the remarkable new aeroplane was laid in a huge hangar put up on the field at Hempstead and guarded as closely as a state secret.

Lester made a hurried trip to Washington to confer with the Austrian am-

(Continued on page seven.)

COFFEE CONGESTION

Causes a Variety of Ails.

A happy old lady in Wisconsin says: "During the time I was a coffee drinker I was subject to sick headaches, sometimes lasting 2 or 3 days, totally unfitting me for anything.

"To this affliction was added, some years ago, a trouble with my heart that was very painful, accompanied by a smothering sensation and faintness.

"Dyspepsia, also, came to make life harder to bear. I took all sorts of patent medicines, but none of them helped me for any length of time.

"The doctors frequently told me that coffee was not good for me; but without coffee I felt as if I had no breakfast. I finally decided about 2 years ago to abandon the use of coffee entirely, and as I had read a great deal about Postum I concluded to try that for a breakfast beverage.

"I liked the taste of it and was particularly pleased to notice that it did not 'come up' as coffee used to. The bad spells with my heart grew less and less frequent, and finally ceased altogether, and I have not had an attack of sick headache for more than a year. My digestion is good, too, and I am thankful that I am once more a healthy woman. I know my wonderful restoration to health came from quitting coffee and using Postum." Name given by the Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

"There's a reason," and it is this: Coffee has a direct action on the liver with some people, and causes partial congestion of that organ preventing the natural outlet of the secretions. Then may follow biliousness, sallow skin, headaches, constipation and finally a change of the blood corpuscles and nervous prostration.

Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in pkgs. "There's a Reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

On the Trail.

"I'm no thief! I'm a respectable workingman!"

Sherlock Holmes raised his half closed eyes. "But your hands," he said, musingly, "your hands do not seem to be calloused."

"That's because I'm a foreman—I give orders," the suspected man explained.

The great detective sighed softly. "Will you please let me see your tongue?" he begged.

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Specialist in the Treatment of Drug Habits Volunteers His Services.

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While the remedy so successfully used by Dr. Perkins has brought relief to thousands, there are many more thousands who should immediately send for a trial supply, which is being distributed gratuitously. Dr. Perkins states also that he cooperates with physicians in any locality.

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Mrs. Minks—Poor thing! She has lost all her relatives in some terrible catastrophe, or else she can't find a spring-style bonnet that is becoming.

J. P.

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Of Two Evils.

"Does my playing the piano annoy you, papa?" asked the daughter.

"O, no, daughter, go right on," replied the parent. "It prevents me hearing a lot of your mother's conversation!"

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"Nonsense, George," said the college damsel. "You don't breathe from your heart. You breathe from your diaphragm."

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(Continued from page six.)

bassador regarding the purchase of the radium required for the flight to the moon. The envoy gasped when the aviator reckoned that he needed at least a quarter of a million dollars' worth for his purpose. He thought that his government would not part with so much at once, but Babcock induced him to cable the order. In two days word came that the purchaser must be vouched for by his government.

Babcock thereupon appealed to the state department. There it was necessary for him to reveal all his secret plans before he could obtain the necessary indorsement. His high standing as as aviator, coupled with the reputation of Professor Jekyll as a scientist at length won him this.

But the Austrian government, sole holder of the world's supply of radium, was a stern merchant. Announcement came that the order would be filled but that it was a case of "cash in advance."

The aviator, with the aid of Virginia's swelling bank account, deposited the required amount with the ambassador and had him cable notice of it to Vienna so that the shipment would suffer no delay.

But diplomacy was not in such a hurry. In a week the word arrived that the order for radium, unprecedented in size, could not be filled at once. A month would be needed to prepare it for shipment.

"The Moon Trio"—as Babcock, Professor Jekyll and Miss Larned had dubbed themselves—chafed at the delay at first, but became reconciled to it when they found that their new aircraft could not be constructed as rapidly as they had thought.

The intricate parts had to be made with extra nicety. The marvelous double engine tested the capacity of skilled engineers. The propellers of bronze required the last exertion of care in their casting. The apparatus by which oxygen and nitrogen were fused in creating their supply of fresh air necessary when they soared into the atmosphereless vault of the sky proved more formidable in manufacture than first laid plans had indicated. The automatic balancing mechanism of Babcock's own devising proved a far more intricate piece of work for the huge moon flyer than it had for the smaller machines on which the inventor had tested it.

Yet the work went forward with a touch of certainty that spoke eloquently of Babcock's foresight in laying out the original plans. There was an unfaltering method, a sure fitting of all the parts that disproved any suspicion that he might be only an erratic dreamer of aerial possibilities. Things moved in the closely-guarded hangar with an accuracy and decision that bespoke a genius.

Both Virginia and Professor Jekyll each day paid visits to the scene of operations. The former daily became more deeply attached to the aviator. The scientist daily flushed higher in the expectation of ultimate success.

Miss Larned set an afternoon at "The Nookery" to return the great moon diamond to Professor Jekyll. It was planned as a surprise and it was to the man of science. His eyes went moist as he again beheld his beloved gem, and he hugged it much as a loving father would embrace a prodigal son.

But Virginia could not keep the news of her daring encounter with John Dorgan from her lover. She had sent her automobile for him immediately on her return home from her expedition to the banker's office.

In a tete-a-tete over her teacups she told of the device she had used to regain the diamond. She described the interview diffidently because she feared Lester would question her methods.

But he folded her in his arms and whispered:

"Splendid, girl, splendid! For once I'm glad to learn that Dorgan met more than his match. And a woman, too."

He kissed her fervently. Then, as she raised one hand to caress his hair, she sighed:

"I was afraid you might think it unwomanly."

"My dear, that would be impossible to you. Beside, is it not returning good for evil? Really, your achievement probably saved your guardian from the charge of theft."

"Well," she replied, a smile replacing the doubt in her face, "as long as you think it's all right, why, it's all right. So there," and she returned his kisses.

But all did not go smoothly with the triumvirate's plans.

Jeroc, cunning; sharp-eyed and treacherous, lived at fever heat in his efforts to extract from Babcock the vital secrets in his plan for flying to the moon. He quickly recognized that he must learn the aviator's methods of securing unlimited power to run his propellers and of carrying a fresh air supply or all his other discoveries would go for naught.

It would be folly to think of trying to make that journey of weeks through the air on a supply of gasoline. No airship ever dreamed of could retain its buoyancy if a fuel as heavy as that had to be carried in addition to the water supply.

And the fresh air problem balked the scheming Frenchman entirely.

Twice of a night he journeyed to the city and up to that mansion in Fifth avenue to report progress to his moneyed instigators. But both times he had to admit that the problems of power and fresh air balked him. Try as he would, pump Babcock as he did daily, he got no insight into these sacredly guarded mysteries.

Under the spur of the enormous bribe held out to him and nettled by Babcock's secretiveness, he grew desperate. He began to hate this cool, young air navigator who kept his lips so tightly sealed. He commenced to think as fondly of getting even for this balk to his mercenary hopes as he did of the huge financial reward to follow their fulfillment.

It was in this mood he welcomed Babcock's instructions to prepare for a night flight in the reconstructed "Rapier." The aviator, in his preliminary preparations, desired to ascend a few miles in the light of a full and unobscured moon to get some initial bearings.

He chose a night when the summer sky was unflecked by a single cloud and the moon stood overhead—a glistening orb of silver light.

Jeroc's last act before he stepped into the car of the "Rapier" was to thrust his hand into the breast of his khaki jacket to see that the revolver he had placed there surreptitiously an hour previous was still safe. He grinned when his fingers touched the barrel.

"Monsieur," he muttered as he gripped the weapon, "you will tell me zees night what I want to know of ze new airship, or thees little barker weel nevaire let you talk again."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STRUGGLE IN MIDAIR.

Babcock came on the aviation field in evening clothes. He had just torn himself away from one of Virginia Larned's summer night receptions. He disliked social functions, but he had gone this night because she had made it the medium for the announcement of their engagement.

"All ready, Jeroc?" he inquired, hurrying to where the "Rapier" squatted silently on the field.

"All ready, monsieur," responded the mechanician, giving the craft a last inspection.

"Then let's get busy," and the aviator leaped into the car, turned loose motor and propeller and tilted the control as the machine gently moved forward and then swirled upward into the air.

Not a breath of air stirred. Only the whirring of the propeller jarred the tense stillness. The moist night atmosphere made it possible for the aeroplane to rise rapidly. It gripped the air quickly.

Like a gigantic bird with a fantastic whir it bored into the shy. It sped upward into the dark blue, star-studded firmament with the effect of leaving myriads of white sparks in its wake. The purplish-orange tongues of flame jetting from the rapidly exploding cylinders of the motor clearly outlined the progress of the craft.

Twice as the daring aviator soared past the disk of the radiant moon, the sharp outlines of the "Rapier" looked liked some weird wraith. Round and round Babcock manipulated the craft and ever upward.

He cut figure eights with a speed and daring that made even the venturesome Jeroc grip the handrail of the car. He hurdled over imaginary steeplechases. He tilted the nose of the aeroplane until it pointed almost perpendicularly upward.

And as he careened higher and higher, until in the rarefied atmosphere their breath began to come faster and faster, his thoughts were less upon the glory of the magic scene of myriad twinkling lights outspread below them or upon the beauty of the shimmering ball of silver above them than upon the charming little woman, decked in a becoming gown and wearing the blazing Jekyll diamond, who had just publicly betrothed herself to him.

His face was alight with the memory of that palpitating event when upon his arm he felt the touch of Jeroc's hand.

"Monsieur," the mechanician called, laying his mouth close to the aviator's ear, "thees ees like sailing to ze moon, eh?"

Babcock smiled without turning his gaze from the sky and nodded slightly.

"You are going to ze moon sure?" went on the Frenchman, above the whir of the propeller.

"Surely," was the decided response.

"How soon?"

"We should be all ready within sixty days."

"And ze power, monsieur, to run ze propellaires? How weel you make that?"

"That's my secret, Jeroc."

"And your air supply, monsieur? You see, even up here we do not breathe so easy. Up much higher we could not leeve."

Babcock peered closely into the face of his barograph, then glanced quickly downward at the rapidly receding lights of earth.

"We're up almost four miles," he shouted impatiently. "I'm going twice as high."

"But, monsieur, on ze trip to ze moon how weel you breathe to live?"

"Oh, I've got that planned all right," came the decisive answer.

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Laugh at a fool and he imagines that you are laughing with him.

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Some men will do more for a cheap cigar than they will for a dollar.

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It's all well enough to criticise those who are bad, but are you good enough to do it?

Blessed is the woman who is as satisfactory as a mother-in-law as she is as a mother.

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Occasionally a man kills two birds with one stone by marrying a widow with a ready made family.

An ex-bachelor said he hardly realized that he had proposed to a widow until after she had led him to the altar.

It is said that fortune knocks once at every man's door, but some other knockers are not so easily discouraged.

When fishing isn't good the weather is likely to be bad—which may explain why some men are never seen at church.

Occasionally a man who marries in haste spends his leisure in cultivating the acquaintance of a divorce lawyer.

It used to be said that the only good Indians were dead ones. The same might be said of husbands and other excellent people.

Probably more men would strive to reach Heaven if the preachers could convince them that all the popular songs were in the other place.

(Continued from page seven.)

Jeroc, rebuffed, returned to the charge. "You are taking me to ze moon?"

"Surely. I need you."

"But eef I go, I should know how eet weel be safe."

"Are you afraid to go where I am willing to take you?" Babcock shot back.

"Ah, no, monsieur. But to ze moon? It ees so far."

"I can't tell you, Jeroc. That is my secret."

"But I should know," persisted the mechanician.

Babcock darted one quick glance into his companion's tense face. In the brilliant, unclouded glare of the moon he noted the Frenchman's excitement.

"What's the matter, Jeroc? Are you afraid?" he asked abruptly.

"Afraid?" cried the Frenchman, with high-strung voice. "When, monsieur, have I been afraid? When have I evaire tried to sneak ze job when you were ready to lead me?"

"Never," admitted the aviator, frankly.

"Weel, I am not afraid to go to ze moon, neither," yelled Jeroc, but, monsieur, I mus' know zees things I ask you." There was a distinct threat in the Frenchman's voice that made Babcock turn sharply. He always held the mechanician as peculiar, but never before had he ever heard such a demand from his assistant. But he simply smiled broadly at it.

"You laugh eh?" screeched Jeroc, as a livid flush overspread his face. "You laugh at me, eh? By Gar, I make you ze laugh another way."

Quick as a flash his hand sought his breast, drew out his snub-nosed revolver and pressed its cold muzzle against the cheek of his superior.

Surprised beyond measure, Babcock shivered at the touch of the weapon. He looked at it out of the corner of his eye and then at the set, vindictive face of the mechanician. Truly, he had a desperate man to deal with, he realized—and nearly four miles in the air, too.

Fearless, however, the aviator gave no sign of yielding to the demand of the Frenchman. Instead, he shouted above the whir of his propeller and the chug of his motor:

"Come, Jeroc, don't be a fool. Put up that gun."

"You weel tell me what eet ees I ask first," he answered, his face working passionately but his hand still pressing the weapon against the cheek of the aviator. "Queek, too, by Gar, or I blow your damn head off."

"But what good would it do you if you knew?" queried Babcock, sparring for time. One hand was gripping a control clutch, the other down-speeding his engine. If he was to close with this desperate figure beside him, he would need both his hands. Yet if he released his grip on the delicate mechanism of the "Rapier," they would be plunged downward to death from this tremendous height. It was truly a distracting position.

Yet he was not resolved to surrender his precious secrets to the keeping of this erratic Frenchman. Knowing him for a bombast and a mercenary, he felt that to reveal them to him would be little better than to publish them to the world.

"That make no deeference to me," screamed Jeroc, his weapon wabbling in his passion-shaken hand; "I want to know—and ze truth, too."

"But what good would it do to shoot—to kill me?" persisted Babcock, questing eagerly for some method to extricate himself.

"Ha-ha," snorted the mechanician, "eet means money."

For the first time the suspicion flashed through Babcok's mind that some one else was involved in this desperate scheme of the Frenchman. Some other mind may have helped to lay just such a plan as this—get the aviator high in the overhead danger zone and then at revolver point try to extort his priceless secrets of flying. Instinctively, his thoughts centered upon but one man as capable of framing such a subtle strategy. And that man was John Dorgan.

"But if you killed me, Jeroc"—the aviator had to grip himself to conceal the excitement under which he labored in this partial revelation of a miserable plot—"it would do no good. You would be caught and punished."

"Not so, not so," hurled back the other with a hateful grin. "Eet would be so easy. I keel you. I sail out over ze Atlanteec and I drop your carcase into ze sea. No one can evaire find eet. Then I fly way off to ze land. I come down and I break ze 'Rapier.' I say accident. I say you fall out. I say I been hurt. I throw ze gun away. And who shall say deeferent? Ha, eet ees ze clevaire scheme, ees eet not?" and Jeroc in his exultation committed the indiscretion of removing his revolver from the cheek of the aviator and grinningly tapping his own forehead.

The motion furnished the opening Babcock had been anxiously waiting for. Gripping between his knees the clutch one hand had held—and fortunately it happened to be the hand nearest the mechanician—he crooked his elbow and in a flash jammed it upward into the Frenchman's face.

The blow loosened the mechanician's hold on his weapon which fell to the floor of the cab. Dazed, he could not recover before Lester, following up his advantage drove his elbow once more with a violent jerk into his opponent's neck.

Breathless, Jeroc was nevertheless game. He came back at Babcock like a fiend. He threw one arm around his neck and the other about his waist. He tried to drag him from the apparatus upon which their safety depended.

But Babcock, all steel sinews and nerves, was some grappler himself. He managed to get his free arm about the Frenchman's neck and squeeze it until his foe fairly gurgled for breath.

Like a dream and as fleeting, their astounding situation flashed upon the aviator.

Four miles above the earth—so high that in the translucent moonlight only one great beacon of all the myriad lights of the metropolis was able to extend its rays to them—gripped in an embrace that plotted for death on one side and wrestled for life on the other, with the control of the "Rapier" committed to the scant hold Babcock's two knees retained on the clutch, these two men panted for mastery.

To Lester it came quickly that unless he overcame his foe speedily, the tide of battle was likely to go against him. In his strained position he could not expect to do as much with one arm as his desperate antagonist could do with two.

Accordingly he risked all. Loosing his other hand from the motor, forgetful of the clutch that his knees steadied, with the elbow he had used upon Jeroc's neck, he thrust him back savagely. Then with a round arm blow he brought the fist of his other hand against the chin of the Frenchman with crushing force.

The mechanician crumbled like a frost-bitten flower. His arms relaxed from about Babcock and with eyes glazed he flopped back limply into a corner of the cab.

The aviator stooped to grasp the fallen revolver just as the aeroplane swerved sickeningly earthward.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLOT REINFORCED.

Lester Babcock's dexterity was equal to the task of bringing his wildly swerving flyer back to an even keel. Slipping the revolver into his white evening waistcoat, he grabbed and manipulated his clutches with one hand and steadied his motor with the other.

In less than a minute the "Rapier" was again winging its way forward but with its prow now pointed downward. The aviator decided it unwise to ascend farther with so dangerous a companion.

It took them nearly half an hour to glide to earth. The moonlight was so brilliant that half way down, Babcock was able to pick out the aviation field and direct his course thither.

Jeroc came to long before the earth was reached. He looked about uneasily for his revolver and seemed to shrivel again when he failed to discover it.

"I've got your gun," shouted Lester when he noted the Frenchman's search. "And if you make a false move again, I'll use it on you."

The thrat was sufficient. Jeroc never peeped all the way to terra firma. He scowled hatefully, but otherwise controlled himself.

As he stepped out of the cab on reaching the ground, Lester tapped him on the shoulder.

"Jeroc," he said quietly, "what did you ever try such a foolish thing as that? Have you been drinking?"

The mechanician looked away sullenly.

"That ees my affair," he blurted.

"Very well. You and I quit right here. Come round tomorrow and I'll pay you up."

"You—you—are deescharging me? You weel not have me more?"

"After your outbreak tonight? Not much. I run chances enough without taking on a few more in the shape of you."

"Oh, very weel," said Jeroc nonchalantly. "I can do bettaire with some one else."

"Who?" shot back Lester. "John Dorgan?"

The chance shot found a mark. The Frenchman winced, grinned scornfully and replied:

"Eet ees again, Monsieur Babcock, none of your affair."

"One word more, Jeroc. I've spotted you for a dirty traitor. You are nothing but a tool of Dorgan's. Very well, serve him. But let me tell you this: If I ever catch you snooping around my hangars again, I'll take pleasure in knocking your damned head off. And tomorrow I shall instruct every one of my guards to serve you the same way. Now, you vamoose," and Babcock dexterously elevated one foot with a force that landed Jeroc sprawling on his face.

The mechanician picked himself up, shifted one hand over his clothes and then turned to his late employer.

"You weel see me again, Monsieur Babcock, and you weel not like ze meeting. I weel fool you yet."

Lester drew out the revolver he had appropriated and swirled it aloft.

"Don't forget that I hold this over your head if you start any more of your French antics," he called after the retreating figure.

(Continued on page twenty-three.)

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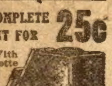

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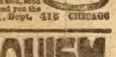

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Famous Ghost Stories

MR. HIGGINBOTHAM'S CATASTROPHE

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

A YOUNG fellow, a tobacco-pedler by trade, was on his way from Morristown, where he had dealt largely with the Deacon of the Shaker settlement, to the village of Parker's Falls, on Salmon River. He had a neat little cart, painted green, with a box of cigars depicted on each side-panel, and an Indian chief, holding a pipe and a golden tobacco-stalk, on the rear. The pedler drove a smart little mare, and was a young man of excellent character, keen at a bargain, but none the worse liked by the Yankees; who, as I have heard them say, would rather be shaved with a sharp razor than a dull one. Especially was he beloved by the pretty girls along the Connecticut, whose favor he used to court by presents of the best smoking tobacco in his stock; knowing well that the country lasses of New England are generally great performers on pipes. Moreover, as will be seen in the course of my story, the pedler was inquisitive, and something of a tattler, always itching to hear the news, and anxious to tell it again.

After an early breakfast at Morristown, the tobacco-pedler, whose name was Dominicus Pike, had traveled seven miles through a solitary piece of woods, without speaking a word to anybody but himself and his little gray mare. It being nearly seven o'clock, he was as eager to hold a morning gossip as city shopkeeper to read the morning paper. An opportunity seemed at hand, when, after lighting a cigar with a sun-glass, he looked up and perceived a man coming over the brow of the hill, at the foot of which the pedler had stopped his green cart. Dominicus watched him as he descended, and noticed that he carried a bundle over his shoulder on the end of a stick, and traveled with a weary, yet determined pace. He did not look as if he had started in the freshness of the morning, but had footed it all night, and meant to do the same all day.

"Good morning, mister," said Dominicus, when within speaking distance. "You go a pretty good jog. What's the latest news at Parker's Falls?"

The man pulled the broad brim of a gray hat over his eyes, and answered, rather sullenly, that he did not come from Parker's Falls, which, as being the limit of his own day's journey, the pedler had naturally mentioned in his inquiry.

"Well, then," rejoined Dominicus Pike, "let's have the latest news where you did come from. I'm not particular about Parker's Falls. Any place will answer."

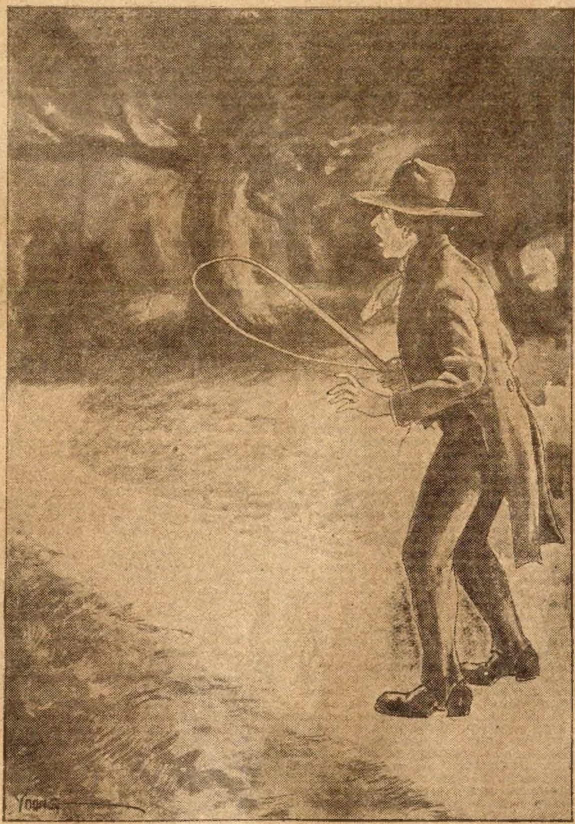
Being thus importuned, the traveler—who was as ill-looking a fellow as one would desire to meet, in a solitary piece of woods—appeared to hesitate a little, as if he was either searching his memory for news or weighing the expediency of telling it. At last, mounting on the step of the cart, he whispered in the ear of Dominicus, though he might have shouted aloud and no other mortal would have heard him.

"I do remember one little trifle of news," said he. "Old Mr. Higginbotham, of Kimballton, was murdered in his orchard, at eight o'clock last night, by an Irishman and a nigger. They strung him up to the branch of a St. Michael's pear-tree, where nobody would find him till the morning."

As soon as this horrible intelligence was communicated the stranger betook himself to his journey again, with more speed than ever, not even turning his head when Dominicus invited him to smoke a Spanish cigar and relate all the particulars. The pedler whistled to his mare and went up the hill, pondering on the doleful fate of Mr. Higginbotham, whom he had known in the way of trade, having sold him many a bunch of long nines, and a great deal of pigtail, lady's twist, and fig tobacco. He was rather astonished at the rapidity with which the news had spread. Kimballton was nearly sixty miles distant in a straight line; the murder had been perpetrated only at eight o'clock the preceding night; yet Dominicus had heard of it at seven in the morning, when in all probability, poor Mr. Higginbotham's own family had but just discovered his corpse, hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree. The stranger on foot must have worn seven-league boots, to travel at such a rate.

"Ill news flies fast, they say," thought Dominicus Pike; "but this beats railroads. The fellow ought to be hired to go express with the President's Message."

The difficulty was solved by supposing that the narrator had made a mistake of one day in the date of the occurrence; so that our friend did not hesitate to introduce the story at every tavern and country store along the road, expending a whole bunch of Spanish wrappers among at least twenty horrified audiences. He found himself invariably the first bearer of the intelligence, and was so pestered with questions that he could not avoid filling up the outline, till it became quite a respectable narrative. He met with one piece of corroborative evidence. Mr. Higginbotham was a trader; and a former clerk of his, to whom Dominicus related the facts, testified that the old gentleman was accustomed to return home through the orchard, about nightfall, with the money and valuable papers of the store in his pocket. The clerk manifested but little grief at Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe, hinting, what the pedler had discovered in his own dealings with him, that he was a crusty old fellow, as close as a vise. His property would descend to a pretty niece who was now keeping school in Kimballton.


Something seemed to struggle beneath the branch.

What with telling the news for the public good, and driving bargains for his own, Dominicus was so much delayed on the road that he chose to put up at a tavern, about five miles short of Parker's Falls. After supper, lighting one of his prime cigars, he seated himself in the barroom, and went through the story of the murder, which had grown so fast that it took him a half hour to tell. There were as many as twenty people in the room, nineteen of whom received it all for gospel. But the twentieth was an elderly farmer, who had arrived on horseback a short time before, and was now seated in a corner smoking his pipe. When the story was concluded, he rose up very deliberately, brought his chair right in front of Dominicus, and stared him full in the face, puffing out the vilest tobacco smoke the pedler had ever smelled.

"Will you make affidavit," demanded he in the tone of a country justice taking an examination, "that old Squire Higginbotham of Kimballton was murdered in his orchard the night before last, and found hanging on his great pear-tree yesterday morning?"

"I tell the story as I heard it," answered Dominicus, dropping his half-burned cigar; "I don't say that I saw the thing done. So I can't take my oath that he was murdered exactly in that way."

"But I can take mine," said the farmer, "that if Squire Higginbotham was murdered night before last I drank a glass of bitters with his ghost this morning. Being a neighbor of mine, he called me into his store, as I was riding by, and treated me, and then asked me to do a little business for him on the road. He didn't seem to know any more about his own murder than I did."

"Why, then, it can't be a fact!" exclaimed Dominicus Pike.

"I guess he'd have mentioned it, if it was," said the old farmer; and he removed his chair back to the corner, leaving Dominicus quite down in the mouth.

Here was a sad resurrection of old Mr. Higginbotham! The pedler had no heart to mingle in the conversation any more, but comforted himself with a glass of gin and water, and went to bed, where, all night long, he dreamed of hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree. To avoid the old farmer (whom he so detested that his suspension would have pleased him better than Mr. Higginbotham's), Dominicus

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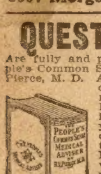
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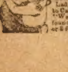

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rose in the gray of the morning, put the little mare into the green cart, and trotted swiftly away toward Parker's Falls. The fresh breeze, the dewy road, and the pleasant summer dawn revived his spirits, and might have encouraged him to repeat the old story had there been anybody awake to hear it. But he met neither ox-team, light wagon, chaise, horseman, nor foot-traveler, till, just as he crossed Salmon River, a man came trudging down to the bridge with a bundle of his shoulder, on the end of a stick.

"Good morning, mister," said the pedler, reining in his mare. "If you come from Kimballton or that neighborhood maybe you can tell me the real fact about this affair of old Mr. Higginbotham. Was the old fellow actually murdered, two or three nights ago, by an Irishman and a nigger?"

Dominicus had spoken in too great a hurry to observe, at first, that the stranger himself had a deep tinge of negro blood. On hearing this sudden question, the Ethiopian appeared to change his skin, its yellow hue becoming a ghastly white, while, shaking and stammering, he thus replied:

"No! no! There was no colored man! It was an Irishman that hanged him last night, at eight o'clock. I came away at seven! His folks can't have looked for him in the orchard yet."

Scarcely had the yellow man spoken, when he interrupted himself, and, though he seemed weary enough before, continued his journey at a pace which would have kept the pedler's mare on a smart trot. Domimicus stared after him in great perplexity. If the murder had not been committed till Tuesday night, who was the prophet that had foretold it, in all its circumstances, on Tuesday morning? If Mr. Higginbotham's corpse were not yet discovered by his own family, how came the mulatto, at above thirty miles' distance, to know that he was hanging in the orchard, especially as he had left Kimballton before the unfortunate man was hanged at all? These ambiguous circumstances, with the stranger's surprise and terror, made Dominicus think of raising a hue and cry after him, as an accomplice in the murder; since a murder, it seemed, had really been perpetrated.

"But let the poor devil go," thought the pedler. "I don't want his black blood on my head; and hanging the nigger wouldn't unhang Mr. Higginbotham. Unhang the old gentleman! It's a sin, I know; but I should hate to have him come to life a second time, and give me the lie!"

With these meditations, Dominicus Pike drove into the street of Parker's Falls, which, as everybody knows, is as thrilling a village as three cotton factories and a slitting mill can make it. The machinery was not in motion, and but a few of the shop doors unbarred, when he alighted in the stable-yard of the tavern, and made it his first business to order the mare four quarts of oats. His second duty, of course, was to impart Mr. Higginbotham's catastrophe to the hostler. He deemed it advisable, however, not to be too positive as to the date of the direful fact, and also to be uncertain whether it were perpetrated by an Irishman and a mulatto, or by the son of Erin alone. Neither did he profess to relate it on his own authority, nor that of any one person; but mentioned it as a report generally diffused.

The story ran through the town like fire among girdled trees, and became so much the universal talk that nobody could tell whence it had originated. Mr. Higginbotham was as well known at Parker's Falls as any citizen of the place, being part owner of the slitting mill, and a considerable stockholder in the cotton factories. The inhabitants felt their own prosperity interested in his fate. Such was the excitement that the "Parker's Falls Gazette" anticipated its regular day of publication, and came out with half a form of blank paper and a column of double pica emphasized with capitals, and headed "HORRID MURDER OF MR. HIGGINBOTHAM!" Among other dreadful details, the printed account described the mark of the cord around the dead man's neck, and stated the number of thousand dollars of which he had been robbed; there was much pathos also about the affliction of his niece, who had gone from one fainting fit to another, ever since her uncle was found hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree with his pockets inside out. The village poet likewise commemorated the young lady's grief in seventeen stanzas of a ballad. The selectmen held a meeting, and, in consideration of Mr. Higginbotham's claims on the town, determined to issue handbills, offering a reward of five hundred dollars for the apprehension of his murderers, and the recovery of the stolen property.

Meanwhile, the whole population of Parker's Falls, consisting of shopkeepers, mistresses of boarding-houses, factory girls, mill men, and schoolboys, rushed into the street, and kept up such a terrible loquacity as more than compensated for the silence of the cotton machines which refrained from their usual din, out of respect to the deceased. Had Mr. Higginbotham cared about posthumous renown, his untimely ghost would have exulted in this tumult. Our friend Dominicus, in his vanity of heart, forgot his intended precautions, and, mounting on the town pump, announced himself as the bearer of the authentic intelligence which caused so wonderful a sensation. He immediately became the great man of the moment, and had just begun a new edition of the narrative, with a voice like a field preacher, when the mail stage drove into the village street. It had traveled all night, and must have shifted horses at Kimballton at three in the morning.

"Now we shall hear all the particulars," shouted the crowd.

The coach rumbled up to the piazza of the tavern, followed by a thousand people; for if any man had been minding his own business till then, he now left it at sixes and sevens, to hear the news. The pedler, foremost in the race, discovered two passengers, both of whom had been startled from a comfortable nap to find themselves in the center of a mob. Every man assailing them with separate questions, all propounded at once, the couple were struck speechless, though one was a lawyer and the other a young lady.

"Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham! Tell us the particulars about old Mr. Higginbotham!" bawled the mob. "What's the coroner's verdict? Are the murderers apprehended? Is Mr. Higginbotham's niece come out of her fainting fits? Mr. Higginbotham! Mr. Higginbotham!"

The coachman said not a word, except to swear awfully at the hostler for not bringing him a fresh team of horses. The lawyer inside had generally his wits about him, even when asleep; the first thing he did, after learning the cause of the excitement, was to produce a large red pocketbook. Meantime, Dominicus Pike, being an extremely polite young man, and also suspecting that a female tongue would tell the story as glibly as a lawyer's, had handed the lady out of the coach. She was a fine, smart girl, now wide-awake and bright as a button, and had such a sweet, pretty mouth that Dominicus would almost as lief have heard a love tale from it as a tale of murder.

"Gentleman and ladies," said the lawyer, to the shopkeepers, the mill men, and the factory girls, "I can assure that some unaccountable mistake or, more probably, a wilful falsehood, maliciously contrived to injure Mr. Higginbotham's credit, has excited this singular uproar. We passed through Kimballton at three o'clock this morning, and most certainly should have been informed of the murder had any been perpetrated. But I have proof, nearly as strong as Mr. Higginbotham's own oral testimony, in the negative. Here is a note, relating to a suit of his own in the Connecticut courts, which was delivered to me from that gentleman himself. I find it dated at ten o'clock last evening."

So saying, the lawyer exhibited the date and signature of the note, which irrefragably proved, either that this perverse Mr. Higginbotham was alive when he wrote it, or—as some deemed the more probable case of two doubtful ones—that he was so absorbed in worldly business as to continue to transact it, even after his death. But unexpected evidence was forthcoming. The young lady, after listening to the pedler's explanation, merely seized a moment to smooth her gown and put her curls in order, and then appeared at the tavern door, making a modest signal to be heard.

"Good people," said she, "I am Mr. Higginbotham's niece."

A wondering murmur passed through the crowd, on beholding her so rosy and bright; that same unhappy niece whom they had supposed, on the authority of the "Parker's Falls Gazette," to be lying at death's door in a fainting fit. But some shrewd fellows had doubted, all along, whether a young lady would be quite so desperate at the hanging of a rich old uncle.

"You see," continued Miss Higginbotham, with a smile, "that this strange story is quite unfounded, as to myself; and I believe I may affirm it to be equally so in regard to my dear uncle Higginbotham. He has the kindness to give me a home in his house, though I contribute to my own support by teaching school. I left Kimballton this morning to spend the vacation of commencement week with a friend about five miles from Parker's Falls. My generous uncle, when he heard me on the stairs, called me to his bedside and gave me two dollars and fifty cents, to pay my stage fare, and another dollar for my extra expenses. He then laid his pocketbook under his pilow, shook hands with me, and advised me to take some biscuit in my bag, instead of breakfasting on the road. I feel confident, therefore, that I left my beloved relative alive, and trust that I shall find him so on my return."

The young lady courtesied at the close of her speech, which was so sensible and well-worded, and delivered with such grace and propriety, that everybody thought her fit to be Preceptress of the best academy in the State. But a stranger would have supposed that Mr. Higginbotham was an object of abhorrence at Parker's Falls, and that a thanksgiving had been proclaimed for his murder, so excessive was the wrath of the inhabitants on learning their mistake. The mill men resolved to bestow public honors on Dominicus Pike, only hesitating whether to tar and feather him, ride him on a rail, or refresh him

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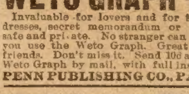

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with an ablution at the town pump on the top of which he had declared himself the bearer of the news. The selectmen, by advice of the lawyer, spoke of prosecuting him for a misdemeanor, in circulating unfounded reports, to the great disturbance of the peace of the commonwealth. Nothing saved Dominicus, either from mob law or a court of justice, but an eloquent appeal made by the young lady in his behalf. Addressing a few words of heartfelt gratitude to his benefactress, he mounted the green cart and rode out of town, under a discharge artillery from the schoolboys, who found plenty of ammunition in the neighboring clay-pits and mudholes. As he turned his head, to exchange a farewell glance with Mr. Higginbotham's niece, a ball, of the consistence of hasty-pudding, hit him slap in the mouth, giving him a most grim aspect. His whole person was so bespattered with the like filthy missiles, that he had almost a mind to ride back and supplicate for the threatened ablution at the town pump; for, though not meant in kindness, it would now have been a deed of charity.

However, the sun shone bright on poor Dominicus, and the mud, an emblem of stains of undeserved opprobrium, was easily brushed off when dry. Being a funny rogue, his heart soon cheered up; nor could he refrain from a hearty laugh at the uproar which his story had excited. The handbills of the selectmen would cause the commitment of all the vagabonds in the State; the paragraph in the "Parker's Falls Gazette" would be reprinted from Maine to Florida, and perhaps form an item in the London newspapers; and many a miser would tremble for his money-bags and life, on learning the catastrophe of Mr. Higginbotham. The pedler meditated with much fervor over the charms of the young schoolmistress, and swore that Daniel Webster never spoke nor looked so like an angel as Miss Higginbotham, while defending him from the wrathful populace at Parker's Falls

Dominicus was now on the Kimballton Turnpike, having all along determined to visit that place though business had drawn him out of the most direct road from Morristown. As he approached the scene of the supposed murder, he continued to revolve the circumstances in his mind, and was astonished at the aspect which the whole case assumed. Had nothing occurred to corroborate the story of the first traveler, it might now have been considered as a hoax; but the yellow man was evidently acquainted either with the report or the fact; and there was a mystery in his dismayed and guilty look on being abruptly questioned. When, to this singular combination of incidents, it was added that the rumor tallied exactly with Mr. Higginbotham's character and habits of life; and that he had an orchard, and a St. Michael's pear-tree, near which he always passed at nightfall; the circumstantial evidence appeared so strong that Dominicus doubted whether the autograph produced by the lawyer, or even the niece's direct testimony, ought to be equivalent. Making cautious inquiries along the road, the pedler further learned that Mr. Higginbotham had in his service an Irishman of doubtful character, whom he had hired without a recommendation, on the score of economy.

"May I be hanged myself," exclaimed Dominicus Pike aloud, on reaching the top of the lonely hill, "if I'll believe old Higginbotham is unhanged till I see him with my own eyes and hear it from his own mouth? And as he's a real shaver, I'll have the minister or some other responsible man for an endorser."

It was growing dusk when he reached the toll-house on Kimballton Turnpike, about a quarter of a mile from the village of this name. His little mare was fast bringing him up with a man on horseback, who trotted through the gate a few rods in advance of him, nodded to the toll-gatherer, and kept on toward the village. Dominicus was acquainted with the toll-man, and while making change the usual remarks on the weather passed between them.

"I suppose," said the pedler, throwing back his whip-lash, to bring it down like a feather on the mare's flank, "you have not seen anything of old Mr. Higginbotham within a day or two?"

"Yes," answered the toll-gatherer. "He passed the gate just before you drove up, and yonder he rides now, if you can see him through the dusk. He's been to Woodfield this afternoon, attending a sheriff's sale there. The old man generally shakes hands and has a little chat with me; but tonight he nodded—as if to say, 'Charge my toll'—an jogged on; for wherever he goes, he must always be home at eight o'clock."

"So they tell me," said Dominicus

"I never saw a man look so yellow and thin as the squire does," continued the toll-gatherer. "Says I to myself, tonight, 'He's more like a ghost or an old mummy than good flesh and blood.'"

The pedler strained his eyes through the twilight, and could just discern the horseman, now far ahead on the village road. He seemed to recognize the rear of Mr. Higginbotham; but through the evening shadows, and amid the dust from the horse's feet, the figure appeared dim and unsubstantial; as if the shape of the mysterious old man were faintly molded of darkness and gray light. Dominicus shivered.

"Mr. Higginbotham has come back from the other world, by way of the Kimballton Turnpike," thought he.

He shook the reins and rode forward, keeping about the same distance in the rear of the gray old shadow, till the latter was concealed by a bend of the road. On reaching this point, the pedler no longer saw the man on horseback, but found himself at the head of the village street, not far from a number of stores and two taverns, clustered round the meeting-house steeple. On his left was a stone wall and a gate, the boundary of a wood-lot, beyond which lay an orchard, further still a mowing field, and last of all a house. These were the premises of Mr. Higginbotham, whose dwelling stood beside the old highway, but had been left in the background by the Kimballton Turnpike. Dominicus knew the place; and the little mare stopped short by instinct; for he was not conscious of tightening the reins.

"For the soul of me, I can not get by this gate!" said he, trembling. "I never shall be my own again, till I see whether Mr. Higginbotham is hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree!"

He leaped from the cart, gave the rein a turn around the gate-post, and ran along the green path of the wood-lot, as if Old Nick were chasing behind. Just then the village clock tolled eight, and as each deep stroke fell, Dominicus gave a fresh bound and flew faster than before, till, dim in the solitary center of the orchard, he saw the fated pear-tree. One great branch stretched from the old contorted trunk across the path, and threw the darkest shadow on that one spot. But something seemed to struggle beneath the branch!

The pedler had never pretended to more courage than befits a man of peaceable occupation, nor could he account for his valor on this awful emergency. Certain it is, however, that he rushed forward, prostrated a sturdy Irishman with the butt-end of his whip, and found—not indeed hanging on the St. Michael's pear-tree, but trembling beneath it, with a halter round his neck—the old identical Mr. Higginbotham!

"Mr. Higginbotham," said Dominicus, tremulously, "you're an honest man, and I'll take your word for it. Have you been hanged or not?"

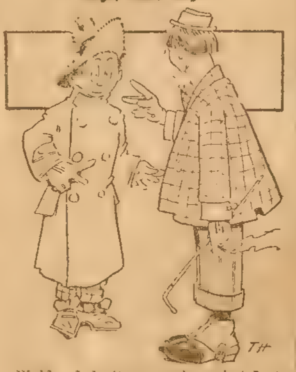
If the riddle be not already guessed, a few words will explain the simple machinery by which this "coming event" was made to "cast its shadow before." Three men had plotted the robbery and murder of Mr. Higginbotham; two of these, successively, lost courage and fled, each delaying the crime one night by their disappearance; the third was in the act of perpetration, when a champion, blindly obeying the call of fate, like the heroes of old romance, appeared in the person of Dominicus Pike.

It only remains to say that Mr. Higginbotham took the pedler into high favor, sanctioned his addresses to the pretty schoolmistress, and settled his whole property on their children, allowing themselves the interest. In due time the old gentleman capped the climax of his favors by dying a Christian death, in bed, since which melancholy event Dominicus Pike has removed from Kimballton, and established a large tobacco manufactory in my native village.

Next week a remarkable story called "Our Last Walk" by Hugh Conway.

* * *

My, oh, My!



Waldo—I don't wemember what I ate, but I had an awful dweam.

Argy—What was it, Wallie?

Waldo—I dweamed my valet wan away without lacing my shoes.

* * *

Benighted Superstition.

Mrs. Slimdiet—Well, that fellow Longhead, who talked about taking board here, is just about the most superstitious man I ever did hear of. He's actually afraid of ghosts.

Maid—Ghosts, is it?

Mrs. Slimdiet—Yes; he writes that he has changed his mind about coming, because he's been told that half a dozen people have starved to death here.

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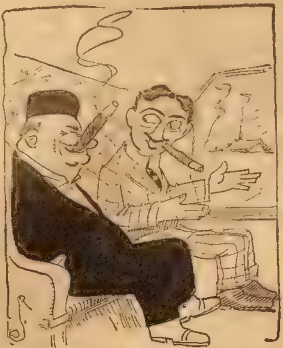
Told in the Smoker.



Clothing Drummer—I was in a town of 15,000 and not one of the people had shoes on.

Shoe Drummer—How's that?

Clothing Drummer—It was 2 a. m. when I got in and the burg was in bed.

Enlightened.

"Pa," said little Frank, as he turned the pages of his history, "can I ask a question?"

"What is it, my son?" asked the father, without looking up from his sporting page.

"How did the cliff dwellers keep warm in the winter time?"

"Why, I guess they used the mountain ranges. Now, don't ask me any more foolish questions."

Unfavorable.

Wife (at breakfast)—I want to do some shopping today, dear, if the weather is favorable. What does the paper say?

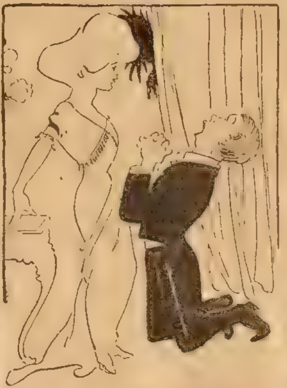
Husband—Rain, hail, thunder and lightning.

An Old Delusion.

Father of the Fair One—How can you possibly think of marrying my daughter? You say that by the strictest economy you can save only $10 a month!

Poor but Worthy Poet—Oh, yes, but if we both save, it will be $20.

Not Worth It.



He—But in time you might learn to love me.

She—Life is too short.

She Raved.

"Henpeck entered into an agreement with his wife soon after marriage ten years ago that whenever either lost temper or raved the other was to keep silence."

"How did it work?"

"Henpeck has been silent for nearly ten years."

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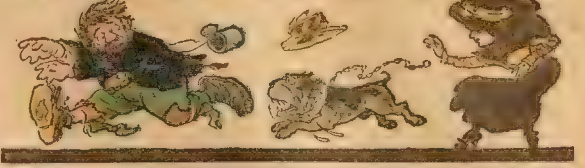


His View.

"Why do they call Washington the city of magnificent distances?"

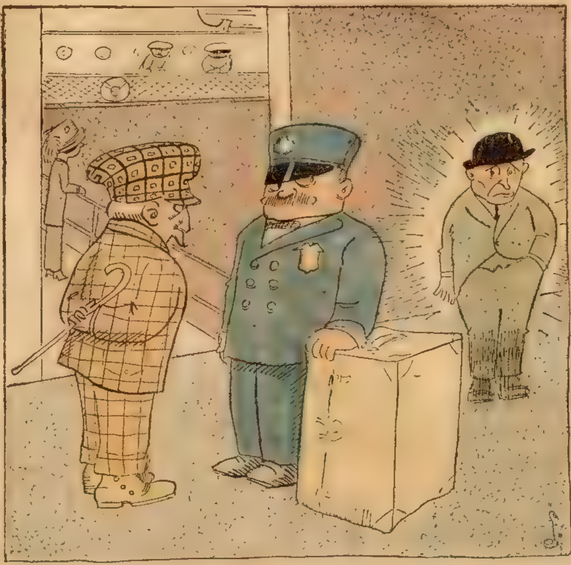
"Because," answered the officeseeker, "it is such a long way between what you go after and what you get."

The Worst.

Doctor—I am sorry, dear madam, but I have had bad news about your uncle. I must prepare you for the worst.

Prospective Heiress—Oh, doctor, you don't think he is going to get well?

SOME GLIMMER.



Tourist—Great Scott! What gives that man such a supernatural appearance?

Customs Official—Oh, nothing, only he has been trying to smuggle a lot of high-power diamonds and when he found he was under suspicion he swallowed 'em and now they're shining through.

Salvage.

Hotel Proprietor—Was there anything of value in the trunk of that fellow who jumped his bill?

Clerk—I should say so. It was full of our linen and silverware.

Plenty of Friends.

"Most very rich men lead lonely lives, but Mr. Gotrox has a lot of friends who speak well of him."

"Yes; he never did anybody but the public."

Verification.

"That young woman who is engaged to a lord denies that she ever sung in a chorus."

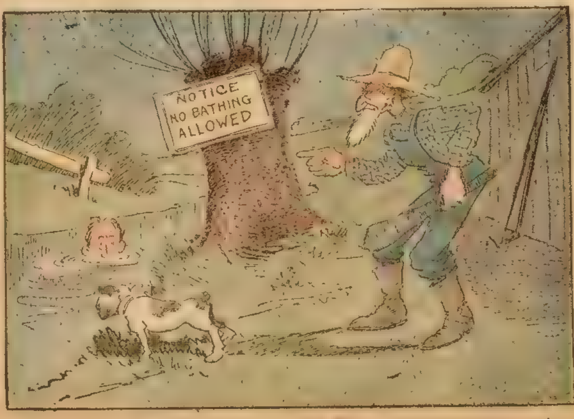
"And I believe her," replied the theater manager. "People in choruses are not expected to sing nowadays."

A Cool Meeting.

Maud—I wasn't aware that you knew Mr. Jones. Where did you meet him?

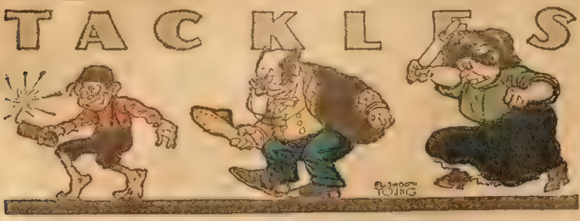
Kate—Oh, I fell in with him while skating.

HIS LAST BATH.



Angry Farmer—Here, wot you doin' in my brook? I shall arrest yer when you come out!

"I ain't a-comin' out. I'm a-committin' suicide!"



Auto Aristocracy.

"He has a grudge against the plain people."

"As to why?"

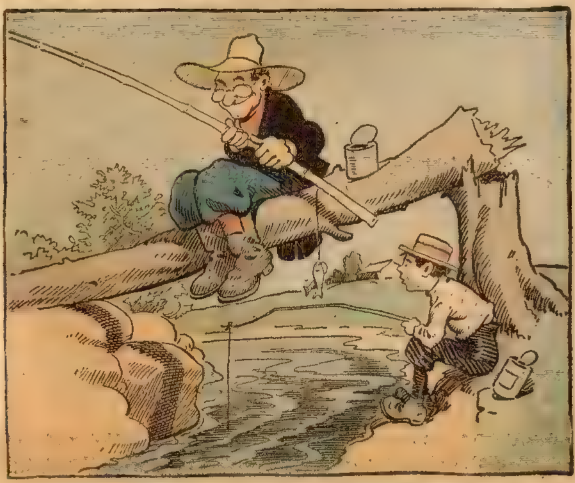
"Says they wear so many rubbers that it forces up the price of tires."

The Family Pet.

Policeman—Do you have to take care of the dog?

Nurse Girl—No; the missus says I'm too young and inexperienced. I only look after the children.

PLEASURE MARRED.



Son—Dis is perfec', settin' here all day an' fishin'. Eh, dad?
Dad (sighing)—Oh, I dunno; we have to bait our hooks!

A Literal View.

Sweet Young Thing—Do you know, these incubating arrangements are humble life tragedies to me in their mechanical substitution to the little chicks for a real mother. They strike me as melancholy.

Practical Farmer—Perhaps they are. They're brooders themselves, you know.

The Horse's Rival.

"Mr. Cleaver, how do you account for the fact that I found a piece of rubber tire in one of the sausages I bought here last week?"

"My dear madam, that only goes to show that the motor car is replacing the horse everywhere."

A Poite Request.

"Madam, may I ask you to remove your hatpin?"

"Sir, you are rude!"

"Doubtless, madam, doubtless; but the discomfort of standing in a swaying car with your hatpin through the rim of my ear must be my excuse. Perhaps my ear is too large anyhow."

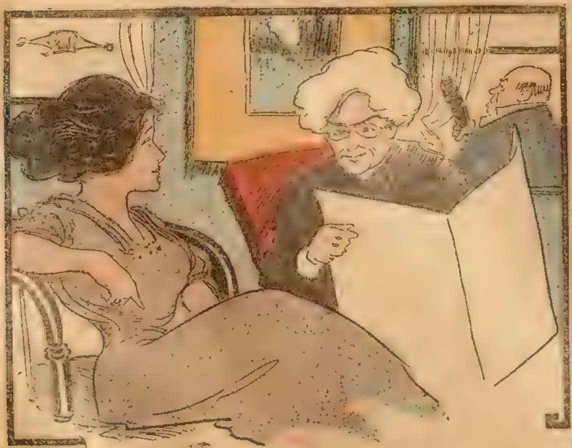
A Regular Communicant.

After the sermon on Sunday morning the rector welcomed and shook hands with a young German.

"And are you a regular communicant?" said the rector.

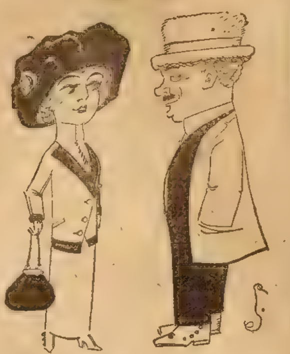
"Yes," said the German; "I take the 7:45 every morning."

ERE LONG.



Miss Dinningham—Mamma, do you think papa knows Harold is going to call for me in his aeroplane?
Mamma—Oh, I think so, dear. He's been hanging around the skylight with a club all afternoon.

The Star.



He—I have just signed our leading lady for another season.

She—Why, I didn't know you were a theatrical manager.

He—I'm not; I refer to our cook.

Cheaper.

"The girl I love dotes on the odor of violets."

"Sorry for you, old chap. I'm keeping company with a girl who has a chronic bad cold in her head."

Saves the Price of the Horn.

"They tell me Gobbins thinks everything of that Swiss chauffeur of his."

"Yes. There isn't an auto horn made that can match his yodeling."

A Secret Told.

"What is the secret of your reputation as a great leader?"

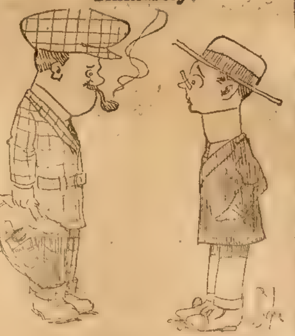
"My skill in guessing what was sure to occur, and then loudly advocating it."

Insisted on Doing So Then.

She—You will never ask me to do the cooking, will you, dear?

He—No, darling. I have a touch of the dyspepsia already.

Similarity.



Returned Traveler—Over in Europe they serve wine like water.

Meekly—That's the way they serve coffee and tea at our boarding house.

Accommodated.

Tramp—Can't you give me a bite or two, lady?

Woman of the House—I can't, but I think I can get it for you. Here Towser!

A Hard Cut.

Cholly Chumpleigh—No; I'll not give you a chance to throw me down. You're too slow to make a monkey out of me.

Miss Cutting—Too late, you mean.

Getting Information.

"Now, this race is a sure thing. You can have a talk with the jockey if you like."

"I'd rather have a talk with the horse."

American Ruins.

"But you have no interesting ruins in your country," declared the baron.

"What's the matter with our racetrack grand stands?"

Business Is Business.

Mrs. Mould—John, dear, do you remember old Mr. Miserskin?

Mr. Mould (the undertaker)—Don't I! Plain oak and brass fittings!

The Spring Crop.

"What's fresh in spring hats?"

"Well, the milliners have invented two or three new vegetables, I believe."

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By WILLIAM H. MANNING

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CHAPTER VII.
"MOTHER SARAH."

FOR a moment the prisoner wavered, but the full store of courage that had enabled him to meet other crises had not been exhausted. Facing the Hillmen steadfastly, he rose deliberately.

"Ready!" he announced.

They left the building and marched across the square, Leland going as a mathematical center of his armed guards. Reaching another house they entered.

Darkness was falling, and several candles stood burning on a table. By this table sat six men, among whom the doctor recognized Giles Leedron and Jabez Roebuck. All were tall, spare of flesh, bearded and roughly dressed, and as the shadows fell upon them there was a somberness and severity about the group that was impressive.

"Be seated!" directed Leedron quietly. "We are still undecided as to what we shall do with you, so we want you to be seen by all here, and questioned by all, and subject to the opinion of all. One man cannot settle this matter."

"Your way is right," agreed the doctor, and he seated himself.

"Each of us will ask what questions occur to him."

"That will be satisfactory to me," responded Leland, meeting the regard of his companions firmly, though not with defiance.

Sweeping a glance about the room he saw that others were there. Back of the six who were seated were six more men, all armed; and back of them, hovering near the door, were several women. Leland remembered Queen Sylvia, but looked for her in vain.

The inquisition began with a question from Leedron, but others joined in, without [illegible] and Dale was subjected to a [illegible] that might have embarrassed a man who was there with unfriendly intentions. He was asked about his past history, beginning with his birth, and about his occupations, residences, religion and associates; he was questioned as to his motive for coming to Shagfoot, and for remaining there; and he was catechized as to the miners and the people of the valley east of Mount Taber, and there seemed to be no limit to the ramifications of the inquiry.

The prisoner was kept busy with answers, yet he found time to see and wonder at the scene around him, and it was somber, almost weird.

Candles burned in the center of the table. Around the board were the six inquisitors, but they were so intensely interested, so gravely and somberly eager, that they leaned well forward and peered at him unceasingly. Wide-open gloomy eyes looked from grim, gloomy faces, and there was never a touch of lightness nor a friendly comment. He was under constant fire from six acute minds, and their look and manner were as aggressive as their catechism was keen.

And back of them the other men leaned on their rifles, equally stern and ominous of aspect—the armed six being younger than the six inquisitors.

There were times when Leland Dale expected that he would be taken out and shot immediately, but as the affair proceeded he began to do a little questioning himself—all in silence, and all in privacy. Why did they, having absolute power, take so much time to decide the fate of one captive? Why were some of their questions of a nature he thought irrelevant? Why did they hang so intently on his replies?

Presently a revelation came to the prisoner. The long examination became comprehensible. The Hillmen were far more frightened than he was—apprehension, not hostility, colored proceedings! And with this sudden understanding, even their expressions seemed to change, and harshness and hostility to be succeeded by timidity, anxiety, and the mark of prayer for safety.

Leland had not been shaken in courage before, but his new ideas gave him great relief. Not losing sight of the fact that the fears of his companions might lead them to do him harm in order to guard their own interests, he nevertheless believed that matters were working to a favorable consummation.

After a long time silence suddenly fell upon the Hillmen. They exchanged glances and appeared to read each other's faces; then Leedron abruptly rose and all followed his example.

"Mr. Dale," said the leader, "you shall hear our decision in the morning. We will make you as comfortable as we can."

"Thank you," returned the doctor. "I can ask no more, and I appreciate your forbearance. I see that I have put you to great inconvenience, but I can do no more than express my regret."

"We will see in the morning."

There was a general stir, and Leland was conducted back to his prison. Leedron personally saw to his quarters, examining the bed as if to make sure it was lacking in no element of possible ease; and then Dale was left alone. But an armed man still paced outside, and he paced throughout the night.

The doctor did not quickly fall asleep after lying down. He understood now how momentous the affairs of the Hillmen were, and caught a dim view of what their struggle for existence was. They were practically like wild animals, hunted and harassed, driven to their dens and hiding to preserve their lives—and the lives of their women and children. When he remembered how long they had taken to decide his fate—a very simple matter in itself—he did not think of smiling. These people lived an [illegible] tragedy, and fought for their lives in the black shadows of persecution.

But there was another question. He was in their refuge. When was he to go forth? Leedron had said, never, and Leland saw the difficulties of the situation and lay with open eyes, studying it. A lifetime there was not to be thought of, but—how was it to be avoided?

In the morning an early breakfast was brought to him, and, half an hour later, Giles Leedron came. The chief greeted him with gravity, though with a little more friendliness than before.

"Your case has been considered fully," he announced. "Let me ask a few more questions: Do you know of any entrance to this place?"

"I do not."

"Do you promise that you will not betray us to our enemies?—that you will not by word or act do anything to give those enemies any clew to our secrets?"

"I do promise."

"Then you can abide here as a friend. We have carefully examined the spot where you came in, and realize that you entered by means of a peculiar accident. In a way, you are not to blame. We give you the freedom of the Haven—so we call our home—and you will find that we shall be as hospitable as our means will permit. Shall I show you around a [illegible]"

"If you please. Release from close confinement will be very agreeable. I hope, Mr. Leedron, that we shall be good friends."

"So," replied the chief, "I heartily hope so, too."

Leland noticed that nothing was said about the duration of his stay, but he was careful to ignore the point as fully as Leedron did. The future must take care of itself.

Going out, he saw other men and was introduced to them, including Jabez Roebuck. Grave kindness marked the manner of it all; it was clear that their decision was not to be half-hearted. Women were visible at the different doors, and children peered nervously from remoter points, but Leland was thinking that none of these were to speak to him when a feminine voice suddenly sounded at his side.

"How do like the Alps?"

He turned slowly. Before him was a tall, slender, stately, mild-faced woman of middle age. In her appearance was primness, mixed with an undeniable aristocracy of bearing, and with intelligence and refinement. Yet, something seemed to be lacking in her facial expression.

"I like them very well," he replied

"The Alps are celebrated the world over," she added. "You will enjoy our rugged peaks, and I trust you will like us. Swiss blood is of the best. I am Swiss, born and bred. I shall expect to see you often. My position here is a trifle better than that of some—my people are pleased to say that, socially, I rank next to King Leedron. High social position is always to be admired, if it be not clogged with weeds."

"Undoubtedly, you are right, madam," answered the doctor.

"Weeds," she pursued, "are the bane of life. They clog, clog!"

"That is true."

"My own life has, at times, been obstructed. Weeds sprang up and did their noxious work; but, here in the Alps, weeds have scant chance to grow, and King Leedron quickly eradicates the few that appear. Pray, worthy sir, would you like to see me at my weaving?"

Leland caught the eye of Leedron, who nodded gravely.

"It will give me pleasure, madam," he asserted.

"This way, sir, and it shall be."

She led, and the two men followed. Leedron pressed his companion's arm and spoke in a low tone.

"Humor her, please. She is not right mentally."

"I understand."

The doctor was led to one of the houses. There he saw an ordinary loom, and the woman seated herself and began operations. In this there was nothing out of the ordinary, but when, ten minutes later, she rose and graciously dismissed them, it was with her haunting idea in mind.

"Good sirs," she said, "beware of the weeds! Farewell!"

Once beyond her hearing Leedron sighed deeply.

"She is deranged, but no other person here has so much of our love and respect. Once, she was a brilliant woman, but the same tragedy that sent us here took her reason. The direct cause of her derangement was a wound of the head Sir, she was the wife of our first leader, Saul Prentice. He died—murdered—in the same hour she received her reason-taking injury. Her name is Sarah Prentice; we call her Mother Sarah."

The half-told story was pathetic, and the woman, despite her mental condition, was very attractive. Leland said as much, and afterward thought of her even more seriously, but he did not then have any suspicion of the events that fate had in store for Mother Sarah and others in the Haven, with her as the central figure.

Leaving the house, Leedron conducted his companion to the great valley where the crops of the Hillmen were growing, and there showed him the swelling ears of corn in their husky covers; the plump heads of the various grains; the blossom-crowned potato tops, and the lesser vegetables that were expanding under the wooing of the sun. A few hours before Leedron was a somber judge; now, he was like a farmer exhibiting his crops to a friend. Afterward, they crossed the gorge bridge and viewed the horses, cattle and sheep, and then returned to the collection of houses.

And neither man had spoken of more important matters during that time.

When Leedron left the doctor, Jabez Roebuck took his place and acted the host. This seemed natural enough, and it was not until the second day that Leland fully realized that, in a way, he was still a prisoner—at all times he had the close company of some one of the Hillmen. Watched thus, he could not hunt for a passage out, nor do them damage.

He accepted the situation with composure. Courteously used, he sought, quietly and with friendly manner, but never over-pressingly, to win the good will of his companions, men, women and children. He was a manly, amiable and modest companion, and he saw that he made some progress, but the Hillmen were shy people, and he remained outside the inner circle.

And still nobody referred to his future, and the chief problem in his mind remained unanswered—when and how was he to leave the mountain refuge?

CHAPTER VIII.
TOLD AT THE BRIDGE.

At the end of his second day in the Haven the doctor was on fairly good terms with everybody except one elusive person. That one was Sylvia—whom he now knew to be Jabez Roebuck's daughter. From the time when she delivered him over to her male friends he had practically no speech with her. They had exchanged bows at a distance, and twice greeted each other briefly, but she had baffled all his efforts to talk further, and her bows and greetings had been smileless.

In the face of this treatment Leland remained outwardly calm and amiable, but he was far from being satisfied. She was one of three women there who were young, and the prettiest by far, and she was much in his thoughts. But for her he would never have come to Mount Taber; now, being there, he was not permitted to exchange a dozen words with her on any one occasion.

As patiently as possible he waited and hoped for a change, and his reward finally came

On the third day, having been allowed several rods from his attendant, he was walking at the outskirts of the village when he unexpectedly met her. Both stopped; they looked at each other, and he removed his hat, smiling gravely.

"I thought," he said, "that I was never to see you again."

"I have received no word that you wished to do so."

The reply was courteous, but scant warmth and encouragement lay back of it. Yet, she did not walk away from him.

"Naturally," he responded. "Still, the wish was active. Being lonely, I remembered that, in a way, it was you who introduced me to this refuge."

"Have you not had a constant attendant?" and with this a smile brightened

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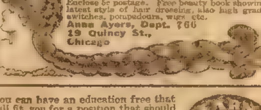

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her face, and mischief kept it company.

"Very constant" he admitted grimly; "but you know you were my first acquaintance here."

"Yes, and I believe we had met before?"

"At the mining camp! I remember! You called there—but we will pass that by."

"You remember, and yet you wish to see me?"

"Even so."

"To see me—an outlaw?"

Leland's face flushed and his expression took on an imploring cast.

"I beg that you forget that unfortunate word. Remember what my condition was when I applied it to you. I had dropped down a mysterious cavity and then scraped along through a dark chute, bombarded by earth and stones into unconsciousness. Is it to be expected that I would come back to life with a clear head? And then, once more conscious, I saw that, after all, I was inside the Haven. Ultimately triumph and otherwise disordered wits should be credited with my errors of judgment. Can't you be induced to be lenient?"

"You forget one excuse that you had."

"And that?"

"You were struck down when Jabez Roebuck was rescued, and—who was there?"

"Queen Sylvia, but was she to blame? True, she cried out to have me struck

flocks and herds grazed. Arrived there they found the young lamb happily on the road to health, but it received much attention and petting from its mistress. Sitting on a rock, she gave the ungainly little creature many a stroke and pat and kind word, while the doctor stood by and watched and listened.

He had found the walk extremely agreeable. The girl had not been especially cordial, nor over-talkative nor over-high spirited, but her pleasant friendliness had been added to by excellent taste as to words and ways, and the outsider was content.

Presently retracing their steps, they reached the gorge bridge again.

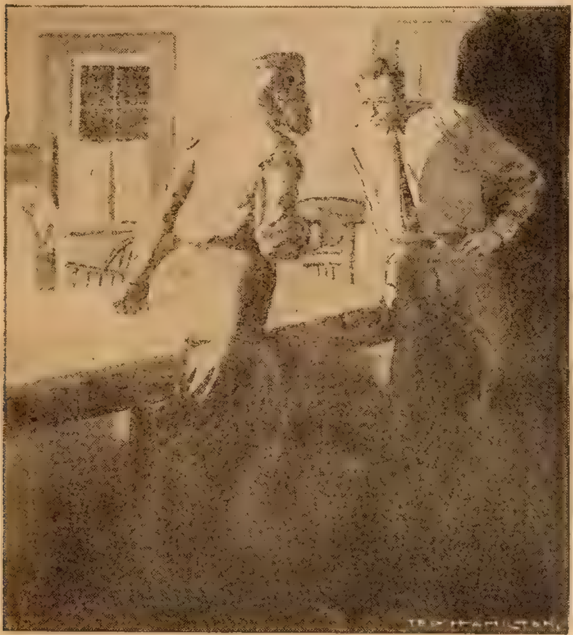
"Is the structure wholly safe?" he asked.

"Very safe, we think," she returned.

"A fall from it would be—ugh! death in its worst form!"

Leaning upon the side rail she looked composedly into the gulf beneath. Two hundred feet below, the stream crooked and wavered and flowed at one side, while the surface bed, elsewhere bare, was a mass of jagged rocks that seemed to reach up their spear-like points as if grasping for prey.

"To be safe one should keep safe," she responded. "Nobody has ever been injured here. A fall would surely be instantly, horribly fatal. Yet, I have been accustomed to the spot from my childhood, and I do not fear."



"Then I will go."

done, as afore said, but why? She was there to rescue one of her followers, and she could not afford to wear silk gloves. She [illegible] what she thought was an enemy. [illegible] I affirm that I would not have given you order—and, having silenced [illegible], [illegible] borne to his [illegible]. I don't blame you, Queen Sylvia."

"If you can forgive a blow, what should I do about a word?"

She asked the question slowly, and the old coldness was gone, but she looked only at the ground

"I will not presume to say, but I know what I wish you would do, and that is to forgive an ill-advised term."

"Then we will bury the 'outlaw,' sir. We of the Haven are not quarrelsome among ourselves; so why should we be with our guests?"

Now she looked at Leland again, and his depressed spirits rose quickly. He thanked her, after which he was prudent enough to drop the role of humility. He talked with her for several minutes about the refuge, and, although she still manifested some reserve, they advanced to more friendly footing.

That afternoon they met again, and as suddenly as before. She was walking briskly away from the village when she happened on the doctor, guarded by Giles Leedron. She stopped short, looked first at Leland, then, half-questioningly, at the chief, and then again at the guest.

"I am going to the outer valley to see a young lamb that is not as strong as I could wish. Would you like to accompany me?—if Mr. Leedron is not in need of your company?"

The chief nodded quickly, thus silently putting the seal of his approval on the project and Leland grasped eagerly at the chance. He went with her. They crossed the ridge and the gorge bridge, and so went on to the valley where the

"Possibly even bridge and rocks know you are Queen Sylvia."

"That title you give me—it is new to me. Queens and kings are unknown here. Even Giles Leedron is not a king. If there was a queen it would be poor Mother Sarah, for she was the wife of Saul Prentice, our first leader, but her reason is gone. She talks of the Alps and of the Swiss, thinking we are in Switzerland, and does not even know her own surname. She remembers Saul Prentice, but less clearly than others remember him, and does not know he was ever more to her than the good leader of our band. But we were speaking of Queen Sylvia! The designation is yours, not ours. I am no queen!"

"Does that mean that I am forbidden to address you thus?"

She gave him a quick glance, meditated, and then smiled brightly.

"Not being a queen, perhaps I had better not command."

"Permit me to use the term and you—may command!"

"I will consider it. But, sir, we are plain people here, and not given to command—have you heard our story? No? Then come with me and you shall know the outline. Giles Leedron will doubtless give all details later, but if you wish to hear the outline now——"

"I certainly do."

She had started, and he kept by her side. They turned back a few yards and ascended the side of the second ridge, and so went on to its summit. Sylvia finally paused.

"This elevation," she said, "is known as Blue Ridge. Sometimes our people hold divine services here, and Giles Leedron preaches. Of course, it is dependent on the weather, but we like the place. We call this immediate spot our temple. Look well, and possibly you

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* * *

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will see that it is not an inappropriate name."

"You are right," Dale answered. "In these sl [illegible]-like stones one can find suggestions of temples, and the place is sightly and lofty."

"Here, then, I will tell the story of my people—if you wish."

"I certainly do, and earnestly; yes, and with great kindness toward your people."

She was silent for a time, after which she began:

"You know that the people of the valley, as we call them, came here years ago, fewer in numbers than now, making their way across the unsettled region with great difficulty. Later, others came and joined them, until there were many towns in the valley. You have seen them.

"Saul Prentice, Giles Leedron and others of our Haven party were early settlers. They believed in the principles of the valley people then, but time showed them things they could not but view with horror. Great wickedness reigned there. Others saw it, too. Finally some families tried to leave. They did not succeed. Just outside the valley, or, sometimes, even in their homes, they were butchered. It had been decreed that no deserter should be permitted to reach the outer world. It was thought that if they went they would not only tell of the practices in the valley, but that others would be encouraged to desert.

"The time came that Saul Prentice could endure it no longer, and he determined to go. Certain of his friends, Giles Leedron, Jabez Roebuck, Eldad Kendall, Malachi Shane and others were of his mind. Warned by the fate of their predecessors, all plans were made with great secrecy. And Saul Prentice was as shrewd as he was noble and good.

"First, he had by chance discovered this strangely-secret refuge. It seemed to be his one hope. To the Haven he conveyed horses, cattle, sheep and other domestic creatures; also, grain and seeds for planting—it was spring of the year—and many other things, but no furniture. How it was done successfully I cannot understand, but Providence had the few families in their keeping. At first, but—but—you shall hear!

"When the time came for the human deserters to leave all passed to this place in safety but one family—that of Saul Prentice, himself. Besides himself and wife, he had one child, a son of three years. Let me be brief. There was an attack. Saul Prentice was killed, his child disappeared, and his wife—our Mother Sarah—was brought here sorely wounded. She had been a highly intelligent woman. When she came back to health her mind was gone; she did not even remember that her name was Prentice. You have seen her; I need say no more.

"The survivors of the party were here, and here they have been for eleven years. Their horses, cattle and sheep have increased in number, their crops have prospered, and, though they have not a sawed board in the Haven, they have built houses from the trees and saplings that grow here freely; for we have skilled carpenters.

"But what has life been? For eleven years the valley-men have sought to find the way into our refuge, thirsting to kill all here, even as they killed Saul Prentice. They have hunted, hunted for an entrance, but the wonderful canyons and cliffs walled us in and they have been baffled. But they never grow weary of trying, and—think of it!—for eleven years we have lived in constant dread. Once let them find the way in and we are doomed; we are thirty-two persons, and they are thousands. And they thirst for our lives!"

She broke down and sobbed audibly. The calm of lighter moments fell away from her, and, beset by bitter memories, she lost power of speech. Presently, and with swift abruptness, she swept the tears aside, and, her eyes flashing, resumed:

"We have been hunted like beasts, yet we live, and if our foes should manage to enter, we shall fight for our lives like the wild beasts they would make of us. Innocent of all harm, we have the rights of human beings. And here let me say that their charges that we are thieves and outlaws are utterly false. From the time the miners came to the camp our enemies have tried to embitter them against us. You can see their motives. First, that the miners shall give us no help, and, secondly, that, perhaps, they will aid our foes to make war upon us. The things stolen from Shagfoot were not taken by us, and the men assaulted there were not attacked by us.

"We are virtual prisoners here. We have never dared to leave, and scarcely to step outside the Haven. The boldest thing—in a way, a mad thing—ever done was the rescue of Jabez Roebuck, my father. For him we risked all, and, barely escaping a trap as we returned, we took him back to us.

"Prisoners? Yes, we are that. Three men, at different times, have tried to go secretly to get help, to have the outer world know of our situation. They went, and they died in the mountains, slain by our merciless foes. The trails, defiles and gulches are always watched and death hovers near us at all times.

"Do you wonder that we carry many weapons? We may have to use them yet. Two of our number were once in the United States army—the men who paced by your prison when our leaders were studying how to deal with you. Here let me refer to the day you entered the Haven. Long ago we supposed we had exterminated all dangerous wild animals in the refuge, but one of our sheep was found dead and mangled. I went with certain of our number, all armed, of course, and made war with the panther. We were returning when we happened on you. Thus, you see, we were really not so warlike that day as we seemed.

"Warlike? We aim only at peace, wish only for that. But even the Hill men wish to preserve their lives. Men, women and children are here, members of families who love each other all the more devotedly because of the dangers they have passed through, and because of the terrible danger that menaces us day by day. There, there"—with a little sob—"my story is told."

It was told—told with a few abrupt interruptions from Leland, but generally with him standing as a mute, somber-faced listener. It was told, and he knew now what the Hillmen were. He knew of the strangeness of their lives, and of the shadow that hung blackly, unceasingly over them.

And he knew that, for a time, fate had made him a sharer in the fortunes of the walled-in people of many sorrows. Sharing their present, he must, as long as he remained in the Haven, share their future. Shut in with them, he was open to the same dangers. But the future was covered with an impenetrable veil.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OMINOUS SICKNESS.

Days passed until Leland Dale had been two weeks in the Haven. It had been a period never monotonous nor wearisome to him. He had entered promptly and freely into the daily life of his companions, working with them in the fields when there was anything to do, and sitting with them in their houses when leisure permitted.

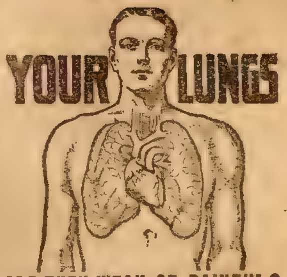
Never talking over-much, he was sociable with all, and had even won the good will of the once timid children. He manifested an interest in the new house that Nathan Bland had planned to build, in the endless weaving of "Mother Sarah," in the fish-dam that one of the larger boys was constructing, in the new varieties of tubers that Giles Leedron was bringing forward from the minute seeds of the potato ball, and won the lasting gratitude of old Ann Morrison by deftly extracting a rebellious tooth. In a word, he was now almost like one of themselves.

He was no longer dogged by a guard, but came and went freely. This, however, made him feel like one bound by honor, and he never went near the limits of the refuge alone. He was now as anxious to be within the sight of one of the hermit people, that they might not suspect him, as they had previously been anxious to watch him. Yet he knew that it was practically as difficult to get out of the Haven as to get in.

He had learned more of the Haven. It was about four miles long and half as wide. The inhabitable part was a depression, with a long ridge at the west that was higher than the way outside. Except for this ridge, with its outlying canyons, it might always have been possible to send a bullet into the depression with fatal effect. A great precipice at the east was equally a friend, and the two ends of the refuge were the only vulnerable points. Impassable canyons shut out intruders, but once, soon after the occupation of the retreat, a man had been shot across the north canyon. Now, the north and south limits were avoided.

From the time that Giles Leedron made known the verdict of the Hillmen nobody had reopened the subject. Nobody asked Leland when he thought of leaving, nor gave him permission to leave. It was a subject totally ignored and it really seemed as if they expected to insist on their declaration that he could never go.

One day Jabez Roebuck had business near the east side of the Haven, and he asked Leland to accompany him. They went, and finally stood on the precipice that faced the valley. Below, fer-



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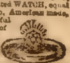

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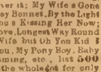

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the land began at the base of the thousand-foot sheer descent, and there were the towns of the valley people, the persecutors of the Hillmen. Jabez and Leland looked, but for a time the former was unusually silent. Then he suddenly stretched his arm out and pointed to the eastern vista.

"They are there!" he exclaimed, his voice breaking and his eyes filling. "Over those trees, and between those peaks, away off there, somewhere—Illinois, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, New York—the homes that my people left to come to this land. They are there, and we are here!"

"Poor Hillmen!" muttered the doctor, half unconsciously.

Roebuck looked long and hard. He could see nothing but mountains and sky, but his heart passed the barriers and his soul longed to go free, back to the old home, or—to heaven.

After a pause he spoke again.

"When I was a boy I heard a story told. Some folks caught an eagle and clipped off the long feathers of its wings so it could not fly, and kept it at their homestead, shut in a yard. It stayed, of course, but when the winds of heaven blew just so and the sun shone and the heavens called it to its natural home, the poor bird would flap its mutilated wings and try to rise, and try in vain. And then it would turn its eyes up to heaven, and seem to so long for what it had lost. Its heart was breaking, and its every look was a cry for freedom and home—freedom and home!"

The Hillman paused and tears ran down his cheeks. His eyes were dim with water, but once more, and very abruptly, he stretched out his arms toward the east.

"They are there!" he huskily cried—"Illinois, Kentucky, Missouri, home—and we are here, captive eagles!"

The arms fell to his side, but Leland Dale stepped forward and took both the brown hands within his own.

"Before heaven!" said the doctor, deeply, "if my life is spared I will yet see these people delivered out of their bondage!"

Afterwards, when he and Roebuck had retraced their steps nearly to the village, the elder man turned an anxious face to his companion.

"Don't tell anybody that I lost my self-control," he urged. "They all grieve as I grieve, but it's our duty to seem brave and hide our wretchedness. Say nothing!" and Leland gave the promise

A little further on they met Sylvia.

"Doctor," she said, "had you just as soon call in and see Irad Harney? He has been ailing for two or three days, and now his wife is too poorly to care for him. I am anxious!"

"I will gladly see them. Lead on, please!"

Leland went, finding both of the Harneys in bed. When, half an hour later, he came out of the house he saw Giles Leedron waiting for him. The chief's face was serious, and his eyes questioned the doctor before his lips framed the question.

"I hope there is nothing to worry over?"

"Leedron, have you had much sickness here in the past?" Dale answered.

"Practically none. We have been singularly free from everything of the sort, and our ailments have been easily conquered."

"What have you in the way of medicine?"

"Nothing except a few things for the children, and then we dig some simple herbs in the springtime to make a tonic for those in need. We keep practically no medicine in stock."

"What herbs grow in the Haven?"

Leedron named them, but Dale shook his head.

"Doctor, what is the trouble?" asked the chief, with sudden force.

"I will tell you frankly what I fear, but you may well regard it as private, for a time. Both Harney and his wife have high temperature, and—well, there is every evidence that they suffer with fever!"

"Fever?" echoed Leedron, helplessly.

"Yes. I am surprised that it should be so in this place. It is not so-called mountain fever, and I am somewhat at fault. Everything seems to be clean about their house—good drainage, and all that—but if it was otherwise I should feel more certain. Frankly, again, I don't like the looks of the cases. It is possible that—"

"What?"

"Well, I hope that it will not prove to be contagious."

The Hillman grew white of face.

"Do you expect that?"

"Between you and me, I fear just that, but I can say nothing definite until the trouble has developed. If it is fever I don't understand. Wait a bit! When you butcher an animal for food it is a community affair, and the work is done at yonder meat-house, and Harney has charge there. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"I want to see the meat-house. Come with me!"

They went. The building, their butcher shop, was just beyond the dwelling houses. Investigation showed that it was scrupulously clean in every way, but Dale looked further. Back of the building was a small depression, scarcely more than a ditch, and into this various washings had been carried by a pipe from time to time. Everything was supposed to flow away, but when the doctor reached the exit he found it clogged. An unpleasant liquid mass stood stagnant and ill-smelling.

"Harney and his wife have worked here a good deal?" questioned Leland.

"Yes."

"Get men with hoes and shovels and have this drain cleared out at once. Further than this, we can only establish quarantine, watch the disease and hope for the best."

It was well said, but the speaker did more. Dale the miner had given place to Dale the physician. His professional zeal and acumen were aroused, and something more. He feared that great mischief lay in this half-developed fever, and dreaded an epidemic. The trouble was liable to be dangerous, and no medicine suitable to the case was to be had. What was to be done?

He thought of Shagfoot. The miners kept as little medicine as the Hillmen. He thought of the many towns that dotted the valley to the east. Medicine was here—yes, and doctors; but the people of the valley aspired to end the lives of the Hillmen, not to save them.

Returning to Harney and his wife he found Sylvia still with them. This disquieted him. Had she not been there at all, he would have urged that she keep away wholly, but the danger had already been dared. Quick to feel for others, she was established as nurse.

He renewed his attention and studied the matter more fully, but each minute increased his apprehensions. Unless he erred seriously, grave danger lurked in the fever that clutched at the butcher and his wife. And he, a doctor, was well nigh helpless.

After a time he went out. He was passing Mother Sarah's home when she called to him.

"Good sir, have you time to stop and see me weave?" she asked.

"Presently, presently!" he answered kindly.

"'Tis a cunning calling, and if the weaver does not allow weeds to gather—"

He waited for no more. Again seeking Giles Leedron, he asked him to go out and search for roots and herbs that might be made useful; for the chief had professed acquaintance with these things in their growing stage. Leedron went, but when he returned his hands were empty.

That night Sylvia watched until twelve, and then Dale, himself, acted the nurse until morning. Daylight found the fevers more pronounced and more threatening. He went to Leedron with a grave face.

"Chief," he exclaimed, "we must have medicine for those people, or we may lose them, and possibly all our other members."

(Continued on page twenty-three.)

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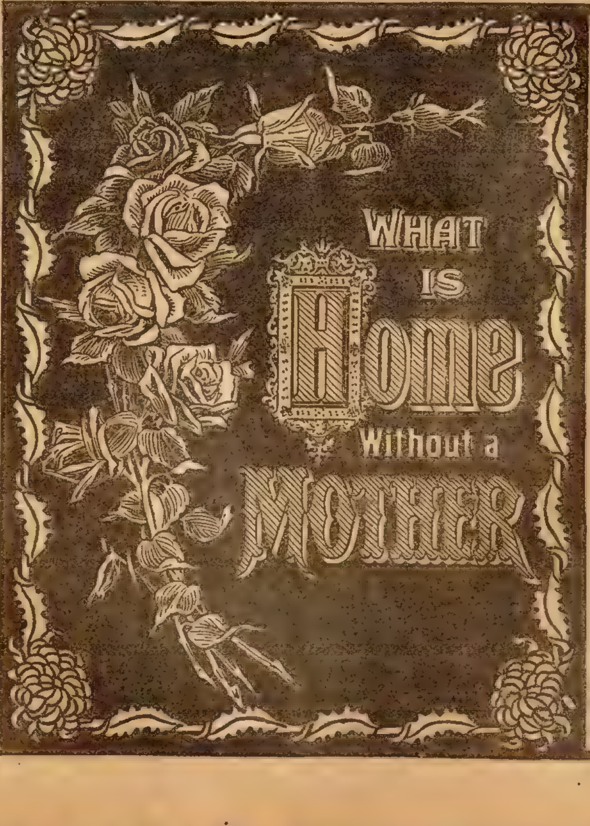

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THE FAIRY CORNER

KATHERINE'S JOURNEY

Far up in the cold North there was a lonely castle. No gay banners waved from its towers, and in its broad halls there was never the sound of merry voices. It lay as still as if it were asleep. It was seldom that the count to whom the castle belonged rode out from it, and he always was so gloomy at those times that none of his attendants dared speak a loud word or laugh.

In her sleeping room in the castle the fair lady of the castle lay upon her bed as quiet and rigid as a marble image. No one had seen her smile or weep since the day when a wicked enchanter in the form of a gigantic black bird had swooped down upon the castle and carried off the count's only son. Since that time even Katherine, the boy's little sister, had not dared to laugh or play. She lived with an old nurse in a remote tower of the castle, and only rarely saw her parents.

Poor little Katherine had a tender heart which longed for her brother and wished to see her parents happy again. But she had no one with whom to share her sorrow except Bibi, the old white stork, which had lived for many years on the roof of the palace and knew everything that went on.

While Katherine lay in her cradle a good fairy had given her the power of understanding the language of birds and animals, so she could talk with the stork when he was at home, but that was rarely the case; Bibi liked to take long journeys. That is why he was so wise. Katherine often asked him to find out where her brother was, but Bibi always shook his head.

When spring came and Bibi returned from his travels he seemed to have something important to tell, for he flew at once to Katherine's tower and gently tapped on the window. Katherine opened it. "O! You have come back at last. The winter was so long and cold and I was afraid I would never see you again."

"Well, I am here, and I know where your brother is," said the stork. "He has been carried away to Africa and has been transformed into a bird, but no one can tell me which."

"How can he be released then?" the girl asked.

"My friend, the little white owl, who knows everything, has told me that if a human being finds the enchanted bird and takes it home, then it is possible that the charm will be broken, but the owl is not sure."

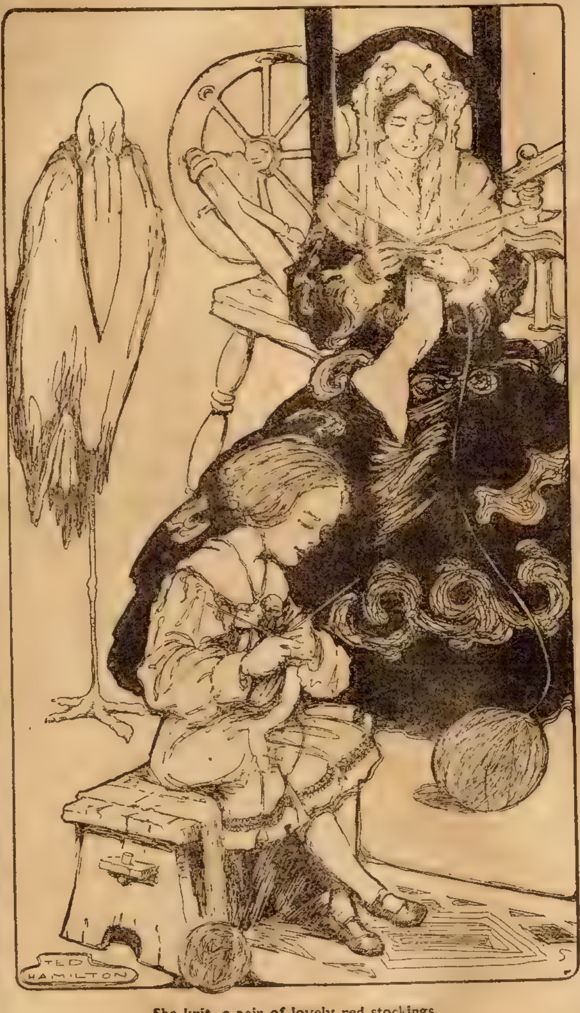
"Let us go at once," said Katherine.

The stork shook his head. "I have no shoes or stockings."

"I will knit stockings for you and give the shoemaker my golden ring to pay him for shoes for you," said Katherine.

"Well, we'll see about it," said the stork, and he flew off home.

Katherine went to her old nurse and begged her to teach her to knit, and when, after many days, she had learned to knit neatly she made a pair of lovely red stockings just right for the stork, and she coaxed the shoemaker to make the shoes.



She knit a pair of lovely red stockings.

$3.50 Recipe Free, For Weak Men.

Send Name and Address Today—You Can Have it Free and Be Strong and Vigorous.

I have in my possession a prescription for nervous debility, lack of vigor, weakened manhood, failing memory and lame back, brought on by excesses, unnatural drains, or the follies of youth, that has cured so many worn and nervous men right in their own homes—without any additional help or medicine—that I think every man who wishes to regain his manly power and virility, quickly and quietly, should have a copy. So I have determined to send a copy of the prescription free of charge, in a plain, ordinary sealed envelope to any man who will write me for it.

This prescription comes from a physician who has made a special study of men and I am convinced it is the surest-acting combination for the cure of deficient manhood and vigor failure ever put together.

I think I owe it to my fellow man to send them a copy in confidence so that any man anywhere who is weak and discouraged with repeated failures may stop drugging himself with harmful patent medicines, secure what I believe is the quickest-acting restorative, upbuilding, SPOT-TOUCHING remedy ever devised, and so cure himself at home quietly and quickly. Just drop me a line like this: Dr. A. E. Robinson, 3791 Luck Building, Detroit, Mich., and I will send you a copy of this splendid recipe in a plain, ordinary envelope free of charge. A great many doctors would charge $3.00 to $5.00 for merely writing out a prescription like this—but I send it entirely free.

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When the stork returned he was greatly pleased with the gay red stockings and the little shoes. "Let us start at once," he said.

"My wings are rested and I can carry you the first part of the way over the mountains and over the sea."

So Katherine put on her red cloak and little cap and packed some good things in a little bag and got on the old bird's back. The bed of down was soft and the motion was gentle and Katherine fell asleep. When she awoke she was lying on the ground in a warm, beautiful country.

"Now we shall walk," said the stork, "until we come to water again. Then I will carry you once more." So he put one wing protectingly around Katherine and off they started.

So they walked, and then they flew, and after a long journey Katherine saw about her nothing but sand blinding hot. Far and wide there was not a living thing to see.

"Now we are in Africa," said the stork.

"How shall I find my brother here?" sighed Katherine. And the stork answered, "Wait, wait."

Then they walked through the deep, hot sand far into the country, and more than once Katherine almost lost courage. But then she thought of her dear little brother and plodded on courageously. At last they came to a great lake on the shore of which stood a few palm trees.

"We must wait here," said the stork, "until evening comes and the birds gather to drink and bathe."

As soon as the sun sank like a great fiery ball into the sea and the cool wind blew over the wide waste of sand there was a fluttering and rustling in the air, and countless birds came flying over. They settled down on the shore of the lake, dipped their beaks into the water and drank, smoothed their feathers, and there was such a chattering that Katherine thought she would be deafened.

"But, Bibi, dear," she sighed, "how can I find my brother among all these birds?"

The stork shook his white head. "I cannot help you."

However much Katherine tried to look carefully over the black, white, gray or bright colored birds she could not find any one that reminded her of her brother. So the first, second, and third evenings passed. Then the stork said, "One day more, and then we must go home."

Katherine cried and begged, "O, stay two days more." But he shook his head. "No, 'tis quite impossible."

So the last evening came, and the poor little girl sat there sadly and looked at the noisy birds, and had given up all hopes of finding her brother again.

Suddenly something softly stroked her cheek, and when she looked about she saw a tiny white bird which had alighted not far from her and was looking at her softly but knowingly.

Katherine laid her hand tremblingly on the stork's wing. "I will take home this little bird," said she.

The stork only mumbled, "Do as you please."

And Katherine took up the little bird, which did not try to fly away, and made a little nest for it in the bosom of her dress. Then they all started on the homeward way. At last they came to the lonely castle, which seemed gloomier than ever. Long, black banners were hoisted on all the towers, for the count and his wife thought that their little daughter, too, had been stolen.

When the stork set Katherine down in front of the gate of the castle she threw one arm about his long neck and gave him a soft kiss on his long, hard beak, and then she hurried up to her mother's room. There she flung open the door in such haste that the servants were startled, for strict orders had been given that no one should disturb the countess.

But before the servants could stop her Kaherine was already beside the bed where her mother had lain motionless so long and placed the little white bird on the silken coverlet.

The little bird nestled close to the mother's heart, and as she looked up in a startled way and saw her daughter great tears fell from her eyes upon the feathers of the little bird and suddenly the feathers disappeared and the countess was holding her dear little son in her arm

Katherine knelt by her mother's bed, and her mother put one arm about her and laughed and cried in the same breath.

Joy and laughter came back to dwell in the castle, and the old stork strutted proudly about on the ramparts, wearing about his neck a golden chain which the grateful father gave him.

* * *

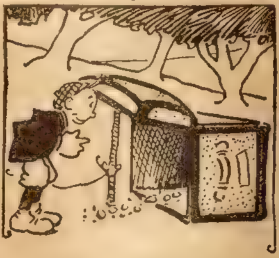
A Best Dress.

The little Indian girl's best dress is very different from those worn by most little girls. It is not trimmed with lace or beading or ribbon or any of the other pretty materials you have. Her dress is made of soft leather and trimmed with beads and elk-teeth. The elk-teeth are the most prized of ornaments, for they [illegible] quite rare. Only two teeth [illegible] are used; so when you [illegible] dress is sometimes [illegible] 0 teeth you can count how many deer must have been killed [illegible] furnish the trimming. These teeth are worth from 50 cents to $2 apiece, and so the little Indian girl's dress is often very valuable.

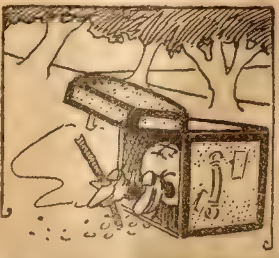
How did her mother ever get so many elk-teeth? They have been saved for generations, each mother hoarding those she inherited, saving them for her children. Each father's ambition is to add to the family treasures. On great occasions when "Little Baby-Not-Afraid-to-Cry" goes to an Indian dance or some great merry-making, her squaw mother gets out her best dress. Of course, she has only one. When the little girl's hair is parted from the middle of her forehead to the back of her neck and each strand twisted stiff with worsted or ribbon, her mother thinks her the sweetest child in the world, just as mothers have a habit of doing the world over, no matter what a child's color may be.

* * *

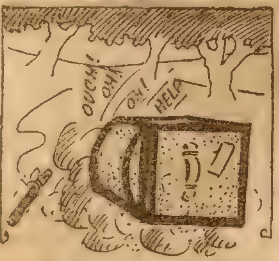
The Trap Worked.



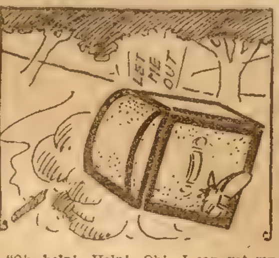
Johnny—This will make a good squirrel trap, all right



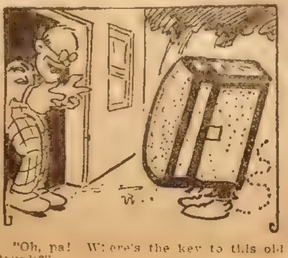
"I'll just go in and fix the bait a little better."



(Slam!) "Wow! It's a spring lock too!



"Oh, help! Help! Oh! I can get my feet through that hole."



"Oh, pa! Where's the key to this old trunk?"

Common Sense

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The composition of Dr. Pierce's medicines is open to everybody, Dr. Pierce being desirous of having the search light of investigation turned fully upon his formulæ, being confident that the better the composition of these medicines is known the more will their great curative merits be recognized.

Being wholly made of the active medicinal principles extracted from native forest roots, by exact processes original with Dr. Pierce, and without the use of a drop of alcohol, triple-refined and chemically pure glycerine being used instead in extracting and preserving the curative virtues residing in the roots employed, these medicines are entirely free from the objection of doing harm by creating an appetite for either alcoholic beverages or habit-forming drugs.

Examine the formula on their bottle-wrappers—the same as sworn to by Dr. Pierce, and you will find that his "Golden Medical Discovery," the great blood-purifier, stomach tonic and bowel regulator—the medicine which, while not recommended to cure consumption in its advanced stages (no medicine will do that) yet *does cure* all those catarrhal conditions of head and throat, weak stomach, torpid liver and bronchial troubles, weak lungs and hang-on-coughs; which, if neglected or badly treated lead up to and finally terminate in consumption.

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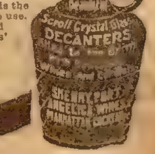

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LIVE STORIES FOR BOYS

THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS;

Or, Wild Adventures in Honduras

By LIEUTENANT JACK JUDSON

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CHAPTER I.

THE WRECK!

IT WAS the last great wave, dashing onward with the fury of a thousand giants, that had cast Tom Fallon upon the beach.

The long, terrible night of storm had passed and the dim light of the new day was beginning to reveal his surroundings.

Out of breath and still clinging to the root of a strange looking tree, the sturdy American boy lay exhausted among the sands yet damp with the spray.

Of the vessel, the Silver Moon, he could see nothing. As far as eye could reach in one direction he saw but the heaving sea, over which a few white-winged gulls were flying. The ship had disappeared.

While he gazed upon this wild waste the events of the night came back to him with startling vividness.

The storm had struck the [illegible] with a suddenness seldom equaled even in the tropics. From the very first the Silver Moon was doomed to destruction. Everything had been done to set her right, but fate was against her. Her masts has been wrenched from her decks and carried away by the fury of the hurricane. Man after man had been swept overboard and their last despairing cries still rang in Tom's ears.

Little did he think when he stepped upon the well-kept deck of the trim Silver Moon in New York harbor that his outing was to have such a finish. His uncle, who owned the [illegible], had sent him out with her as [illegible] accountant, and it was expected that [illegible] would bring home some of the riches of the tropics which border on the Caribbean Sea.

But now that hope had vanished and Tom seemed to be the sole survivor of the disaster.

When he had somewhat recovered he rose to his feet and turned his eyes inland.

It was a strange but fascinating aspect that met his gaze. The beach sloped gently upward, and great trees of unknown sorts covered every foot of it. He saw the trunks that were nearly covered with creepers which reached to the very tops of the giants and also noticed that some of the vines bristled with beautiful flowers, some almost as large as a small blanket.

To add to his situation he had lost nearly everything. His only remaining possession was a pocket knife which would prove but a sorry means of defense, his garments were saturated with water, but he knew the sun would soon dry them.

At last he turned to the sea again. Was it possible that all his companions had perished. He recalled how he had been carried overboard and engulfed by the billows. It was with a forlorn hope that he had struggled through the night, trying to keep his head above the waves, and at last, throwing every hope to the winds, he permitted the sea to do with him what it pleased.

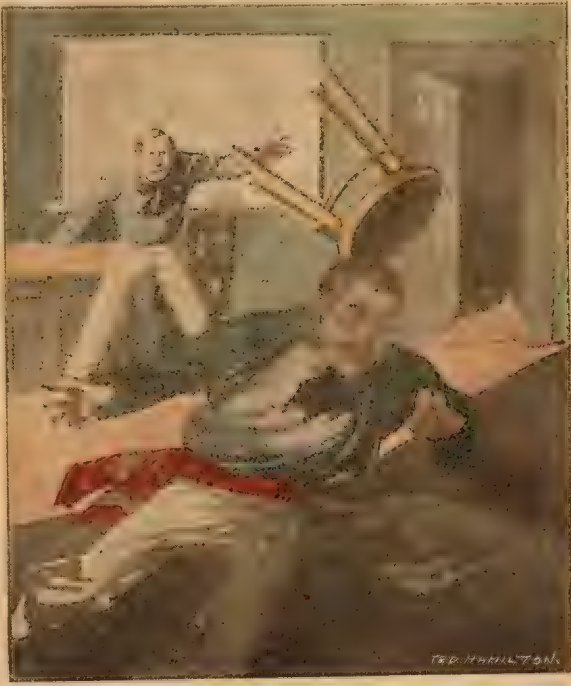
Just where he was he did not know. He remembered having heard Captain Jonas say that they were nearing the coast of Honduras, but the storm might have flung the vessel in another direction, and now he might be in another land where death awaited him.

There was nothing to do but to go ahead.

With a final glance at the sea, Tom pushed forward. He went up the beach, parting the long undergrowth and tearing his clothes on the thorns.

Suddenly strange noises assailed his ears. These came from overhead and, looking up, the young castaway beheld a large ape-like thing on one of the boughs. This animal was making faces at him and Tom shivered as he caught sight of the long arms adorned with ferocious looking hands which seemed eager to seize and tear.

The ape was a huge creature, such as he had never seen even in the zoos of his own land. The great red eyes were encircled with greenish rings which added to the beast's terrible aspect and Tom was glad when he had passed on.



The stool came down with a vengeance.

Once or twice he stopped and drew back, for eyes were glaring at him from among the bushes, but he was not molested. Perhaps the beasts were pitying his forlorn condition.

The farther he went from the sea the denser grew the tropical forest. In some places the beams of the rising sun did not fall at all.

Something hanging from a bough wriggled and opened a huge mouth, and Tom, knowing that it was an enormous serpent, darted away nor paused till he was far from the spot.

All at once his foot landed against something and upon looking down he descried a cocoanut upon which he eagerly seized. He was hungry and in another moment he had cracked the hard shell against a tree and was drinking the milk which to him was the nectar of the gods. Strengthened by his lucky find, he pushed on once more.

Surely, he thought, there must be an opening somewhere. All forests have an ending and somewhere he would come out upon an open scope of inhabited country.

He hardly realized that he was ascending all the time. His eagerness to get somewhere had blunted many perceptions and he had taken but little notice of his surroundings.

At length he felt the [illegible] of rest.

He did not know how far he had traveled from the [illegible] suspected that he had gone a [illegible]

He had had company for at no time was the forest silent. Birds of the most beautiful plumage were everywhere. They made the forest ring with their musical notes and flitted hither and thither like arrows of gold and silver.

One bird in particular pleased him. It was a large one with the colors of the rainbow and with a top-knot impossible to describe, so magnificent it was. This bird flew from tree to tree with a musical chattering which filled the boy's ears. Later on he was to see more of this beauty of the forest.

All at once Tom stopped and drew back.

Human voices had fallen upon his ears. He had reached the top of the slope and knew that the voices had come from the other side. What to do Tom did not know. If he went forward he might fall into the hands of some wild natives, for he doubted that that region was given over to wilderness.

"I can remain here and perish or go forward and take my chances," Tom said, after debating with himself. "I'll go on."

He now moved forward cautiously and came out upon a slightly clear bit of [illegible]

[illegible] first look he dodged behind a tree.

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Just ahead he beheld a number of dark looking men, naked to their waists. Some were armed with odd looking axes and near by was a team of bullocks attached to a rude looking cart. Surely men who drove vehicles could not be altogether savage.

Tom moved down the slope and halted the moment the men perceived him.

In an instant all were staring at him and some were already moving forward.

The young castaway threw up his hands in token of his helplessness and then with a rush the strange looking beings with a great cry surrounded him.

The boy noticed that they carried long bows on their backs and quivers full of arrows richly feathered. They hailed him in a tongue with which he was not familiar.

"I'm Tom Fallon," he said. "I belonged to the trader Silver Moon which was wrecked in the storm of last night and, so far as I know, I am the sole survivor."

At this the men turned to one of their number who came closer and looked Tom over from head to foot.

"Boy lost, ship gone?" this man said in broken English.

"You are right," answered Tom Fallon, delighted to know that the native could understand him. "I came from New York. I was on board the Silver Moon which belonged to my uncle."

"Huh," grunted the native who wore great brass rings in the lobes of his ears.

They were a fierce looking set, but Tom resolutely resolved not to show the fears he had.

"You see I am helpless," he went on, displaying his knife. "This is all the hurricane left me. My other effects went down with the Silver Moon."

If he expected a show of pity he was disappointed. The wild looking lot looked at one another and grunted.

At once the hand of the leader fell upon Tom's arm.

"I'm in your hands," Tom answered recklessly. "I throw myself upon your mercy. Where is the big town you speak of?"

At this the leader pointed away and smiled.

"Is it far?" the boy asked.

"Many miles, little senor."

"You are Spanish, then?" cried the young castaway.

"Caribs, Mestizos."

"Oh!"

"Senor very hungry?" asked the captain of the band.

"I've had nothing but a cocoanut," smiled Tom.

At this the Carib went to the cart and began to take out several kinds of fruit.

There were large, luscious bananas, rich wild grapes, some cocoanuts and the cooked remains of a bird of some kind. Tom stood not upon ceremony, but sat down on the ground and began to satisfy his ravenous appetite. He was watched by the whole band and the leader pressed this and that upon him till he had his fill.

"We go now, little senor," said the Carib.

Five minutes later Tom was placed in the cart, the men shouldered their axes and the procession moved away.

Suddenly the leader dropped alongside the cart and looked into Tom's eyes.

"Senor Goralo want boy," he said with a grin.

Tom started at mention of the name. His uncle's last words to him were:

"If misfortune should overtake you, Tom, and you fall into the hands of the demon of Honduras, Senor Goralo, heaven help you!"

And misfortune had come and he was even now being escorted to this very man. No wonder his cheek blanched at the thought.

"Do you serve Senor Goralo?" he asked, hoping he had not heard aright.

The Carib leader bowed.

"Senor Gorola lives in the big town," he answered. "He is the richest man in Honduras."

"Owns many mines, I suppose?"

The Carib began to count his fingers, but gave up in despair.

"Well," said Tom, "take me to your master. If he really wants a boy maybe I will suit him."

"Can the little senor write?"

"Yes."

"My master wants a boy who can write. He has but one word maker just now."

"After all I may fall into good hands," Tom thought. "This Senor Goralo may not be as bad as Uncle Hugo painted him."

Well was it for the castaway that he took hope once more, for every revolution of the heavy wheels of the cart carried him nearer to the greatest villain in the tropics, and he was to meet with adventures that would try the most heroic soul.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SPIDER'S WEB.

Whilst Tom Fallon is moving over the Honduran hills under guard we will precede him to his destination.

About twenty-five miles from the coast upon which the American boy was cast by the sea stands a little town destined to play an important part in his career. Esperanza is not of much importance even in that wild land, but it was then noted for the man who ruled it and the nearby territory with a rod of iron.

It was a hot day and in one of the most pretentious buildings in the town a number of dark-faced Spanish looking men were attending to the wants of their master. This personage was individual of perhaps fifty, a large man with a scowl on his face. He was seated under the shade of a palm on an open porch with a table before him. One of his menials was employed in fanning him, whilst another was bringing him a bottle of wine. The men, though they were fierce looking fellows, seemed to hold the big man in awe and when the fan did not move exactly to suit him he broke out in a volley of harsh words which came from him like the snapping of a tiger's teeth.

Dressed in white from head to Senor Pedrez Goralo was taking ease.

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fortunate one who fell under his displeasure.

Not far from the veranda occupied by [illegible] wretch at a desk sat a youth who did not resemble the others around him. His face was tanned by the warm sun of the tropics and he bent to his task with occasional glances at the man sipping his wine.

All at once Goralo turned in his wicker chair and called a name.

The boy at the desk got down from his stool and went forward.

He was a good looking lad of perhaps seventeen and had the eyes of an American. When he reached the veranda he executed a bow, but the stern features of Senor Goralo did not relax.

"I am going to send you to the mines tomorrow, Pedro," said the mine king, glancing at the waiting boy. "I think some of the rascals are robbing me."

"To which mine, senor?" ventured the youth.

"To the northern one," was the reply. "All's well at the other mines. I think I'm not getting as much from El Toro as I should have. It's a sorry lot of villains I have to keep track of."

The youth called Pedro made no reply to this.

"I wish I had another boy like you," continued Goralo, striking the round of the chair with his open hand. "It was a wild night and a high sea that sent you to me. Now, if another such good luck would only give me one like you, I wouldn't be robbed daily by these dark-skinned scoundrels."

"[illegible]hen," said the boy, "I will get ready t[illegible]o to El Toro tomorrow."

"[illegible] Pedro," and having done with his o[illegible]t, Senor Goralo turned to his h[illegible] cigar.

[illegible] and by the big man fanned by the ha[illegible] naked native dropped into a slumber and the boy went back to his work.

At length there came down the winding road which led to Esperanza an ox cart escorted by a lot of Caribs.

The slow moving beasts made their way to the plaza and halted in front of Senor Goralo's building. A boy in the cart raised his head and looked curiously around.

The sights were strange to him. Never before had he seen such a looking place. The plaza contained a few gardens in which great clumps of tropical plants thrived and half a dozen ill-looking and mangy dogs were sleeping under the great wide leaves of the palms.

The stopping of the cart and the loud voices of the Caribs caused Senor Goralo to open his eyes. In an instant he was on his feet. His face at once became white with rage.

"What are you doing here, rascals?" he roared out. "This is the way I am robbed by the likes of you every day. What brought you back at this hour?"

The head Carib advanced a few paces and bowed to the mine king.

"Most respected master," said he, "we have brought you a new slave."

At that moment the eyes of the man on the veranda fell upon the figure of Tom Fallon in the cart.

"What's that, Tomaso?" he almost yelled as he bounded forward. "A new slave, did you say? Not like some I have, I hope."

The next moment he and the boy castaway were looking into each other's face.

"Sure enough, a companion to Pedro!" he exclaimed in Spanish, but the next moment he was speaking in excellent English.

"How came you here, boy?" he asked.

"I was shipwrecked last night," answered Tom, still eyeing the Spaniard. "I left New York some days ago on the Silver Moon, but we were struck by a hurricane and I am the sole survivor of that ill-fated vessel."

"And I thank the hurricane for bringing me such a fine Americano," grinned Goralo. "You shall find all the employment you want under my care."

"But," said Tom, "I prefer to go back to my own country."

"You shall when I have done with you. You look like a smart boy and I doubt not that I can give you work suitable to your training. Get down, my boy."

Tom got out of the clumsy cart and was escorted to the veranda by the mine owner.

"My men didn't treat you badly?" queried Goralo.

"They were very kind," replied Tom, who could not but help looking at his surroundings.

"If they had been unkind I'd have them tied up and their backs whipped into strips!" fiercely exclaimed the Spaniard. "You shall fare well in my establishment, boy. I like your people."

Thereupon the Spaniard called for a chair into which Tom was ensconced and orders were given for his entertainment. In a little while food was brought and he was served by several natives who, under their master's eye, did their allotted duty.

The ride to the Honduran town had revived the shipwrecked boy.

The food was not exactly to his notion, but, as beggars are not to be choosers, Tom smothered his tastes and ate heartily.

When the viands had been removed and Tom had settled back into the chair Senor Goralo took a seat beside him.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Tom Fallon."

"From New York, I believe you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"What sort of vessel was the Silver Moon?"

"She was a trader. She came to the tropics for a cargo of mahogany."

"That's the old story, but never mind," smiled Goralo with a shake of the head. "I know all about these things."

Tom was silent.

"You're quite sure the Silver Moon didn't come down here to hunt for gold mines?" suddenly exploded the Spaniard.

"I am real sure she didn't. My uncle who owned the Silver Moon had the vessel fitted for taking on mahogany."

"Yes, yes," observed Goralo.

"We had a crew of thirty men," resumed Tom. "Captain Yaste was an old trader——"

"Captain Yaste?" broke in Senor Goralo with a start. "I know of that rascal. I hope he lies at the bottom of the sea."

Once more the florid face of the Spaniard grew white with anger and Tom saw that his hands were clinched.

"I thought him a kind-hearted man," ventured Tom, "and I know he enjoyed my uncle's confidence."

"The scoundrel!" bitterly cried Goralo, "but we'll not discuss the man. You can write, boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you ever kept books?"

"I have had a year's experience in bookkeeping in my uncle's office."

"Good!" cried the dark-faced mine king. "I can put you at bookkeeping at once."

"But you must understand," said the boy, "that I do not understand Spanish."

"Never mind that. You will soon learn and your assistant in the office will see that you give satisfaction."

Meanwhile the boy called Pedro was listening to all of this conversation and his pen had paused over a row of figures in one of the big ledgers. His face changed color more than once, and when Tom mentioned his own name it seemed that he would fall from his stool.

"From this moment," continued Senor Goralo, "consider yourself in the employ of one of the kindest masters you have ever had. You have the freedom of the town. Go where you will but report here at sundown."

With this the Spaniard rose from his chair and disappeared.

Tom sat still for a few minutes and looked out upon the beautiful plaza. He did not like the looks of the big black dogs that lolled under the palms. They looked too much like American bloodhounds for him and he could not but think that they were there for a purpose.

At last he stood erect and turned his gaze toward the offices, the interior of which was revealed by the open doors.

Almost at once he noticed the boy who was perched on the stool with his face almost glued to the ledger before him.

"I might as well become acquainted first as last," thought Tom Fallon, as he strode forward. "The sea has given me to Senor Goralo, but I will see that my stay here is limited."

The castaway sauntered into the building and halted at the side of the boy on the stool.

Pedro did not even turn his head.

"Good morning," said Tom with his accustomed politeness. "From what the senor has said, I suppose I am to become your companion."

At this the hand which held the pen clutched it sharply and the darkish face of Pedro was turned upon Tom.

A singular smile suddenly illuminated the boy accountant's face.

"Tom!" he cried. "In heaven't name don't you know me?"

The boy castaway recoiled and would have fallen if he had not kept his head.

He recovered in an instant and leaned toward the speaker.

"What!" he exclaimed, looking into the eyes that were glued to his face. "Is it possible? No, no! it cannot be!"

Pedro laid his hand on Tom's arm and looked alarmingly about them.

"It is true, Tom," he cried in lowered tones. "I am Dick Chaffee. Here I am Pedro Menendez. Have they ceased to look for me, Tom?"

Tom Fallon was trying to find his tongue.

"Dick, Dick!" he exclaimed, and then trailed off into silence.

"I've been three years in this accursed country," Dick answered. "I was cast ashore from the ill-fated bark Mary Emma. I am the slave of the greatest tryant under the sun. I wish you had not come into this spider's web, Tom. But please don't be seen speaking to me very long. I'll tell you everything later on. But let me say this: Maybe some time we'll get back to our friends, but I don't know. The sting of the king spider of this terrible web is death!" and as Dick Chaffee ceased Tom turned away with a white face and quivering lips.

CHAPTER III.

TOM AND THE HOUND.

Some little time elapsed before the young castaways were given an opportunity to exchange narratives. Tom more than once saw spying eyes fixed upon him and he had no doubt that watchers had been set to their tasks by Goralo himself.

The two boys made out that they were

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entire strangers to one another and the espionage at last grew less irksome.

Tom had been given a desk in another part of the Spaniard's storehouse and set diligently to his task. He was not permitted to occupy the same lodgings with Dick, as though their task-master was suspicious, but for all this the boys managed to exchange a few words.

One morning when Tom Fallon reported for duty he found ensconced in a chair near him a dark-faced Spaniard who eyed him like a hawk. He had not seen the man before, though he doubted not that he was one of Goralo's trusted minions.

The fellow had a keen look and across his forehead ran a vivid scar as though he had been struck with a sword.

The boy of the Silver Moon paid but little attention to the fellow at whose feet crouched one of the large dogs that roamed about the plaza, and the animal whenever he eyed Tom snarled in a vicious manner.

The boy castaway kept at his task, but at the same time he could not but think that the Spaniard had been set to watch him. He chafed under the espionage.

Suddenly a paperweight which lay on Tom's desk fell to the floor of the room as the boy's arm struck it, and as he stooped to regain it the dog bounded forward with snapping jaws.

Tom uttered a cry and raised the heavy paperweight.

The Spaniard growled out an oath and told him not to strike the snarling brute.

"Let the dog keep his distance!" threateningly retorted Tom. "I don't propose to feel his fangs."

The man laughed derisively.

The ire of the hound was up. He crouched almost at Tom's feet, and the boy was sure he was about to launch himself upon him. Tom retreated as far as he could with the weapon poised in midair.

"Try him, Joco!" said the Spaniard.

The animal answered with a growl and Tom at that moment hurled the paperweight which took Joco fairly between his greenish eyes and doubled him up.

The next instant the watch was on his feet.

Tom in his desperation looked for a weapon, but spying none, caught the stool and threw it above his head.

"Americano show fight, eh?" leaped from the man's throat.

"You have but to try me to find out!" said Tom.

For a moment it seemed as though the guard would forego his intentions, but all at once he caught a heavy whip hung from the nearest wall and advanced again.

"Come out, little senor," he said, pointing with the other hand to the center of the floor.

"Not to be whipped," answered Tom, coloring deeply.

"Come out!"

Tom looked defiant.

The Spaniard whose name was Joao sprang forward again and raised the whip.

It never descended upon Tom's shoulder, for all at once the stool came down with a vengeance and, taking the fellow on the head, staggered him against the wall where he lay half stunned for a moment.

Tom, of course, expected a renewal of the attack when his enemy should recover, but to his astonishment, Joao rose to his feet and without a word hung the whip upon its hook. In another minute he was leaving the room, rubbing his head where a large lump had already formed.

"I've made a mortal enemy of that wretch," thought the young castaway. "I'll have to look out for Joao hereafter."

The dog had recovered from the boy's attack and, with a last look at the victor, slunk after his master and Tom saw them flitting down the street evidently in no merry mood.

That night, as Tom was about to retire, his door was softly opened and Dick slipped inside.

"I've heard of your adventure," Tom's friend said. "It's bad business."

"I feared as much, Dick, but what was I to do?—let myself be torn by that dog and get whipped by his master besides?"

"Not for a minute, Tom," cried Dick. "I don't blame you, but that villain was sent to watch you by Senor Goralo."

"I don't doubt it."

"I accidentally overheard the orders," Dick replied. "Our taskmaster is capable of doing anything. I have seen him have his slaves torn by his dogs without the least provocation. The only American he has ever taken kindly to is Marcelle."

"And who, pray, is Marcelle?"

"I have never told you," said Dick, with a smile. "Marcelle is an American girl who was abducted by some Caribs and sold to Senor Goralo a year ago. She occupies a house at the end of the main street and why she has never been rescued I do not know. I have seen but little of her, therefore I can tell you nothing of her history. It is said that Senor Goralo is holding her for ransom. He treats her kindly, gives her servants and all that, but she hates him like the snake he is. Now let me tell you something of Senor Goralo's mines."

Tom settled back in his chair and prepared to listen.

"There's no telling how many mines this man has in the mountains," proceeded Dick. "They are worked by Meztizos, men who are forced to toil for our master. He has a vault almost full of gold which has been taken from these mines. I know his wealth must be great, for I keep some of his accounts. He will not let any one but Spaniards come to Esperanza from the outer world. The only foreigner who reached the town during my slavery here was blindfolded some miles out and, after his interview with Senor Goralo, he was led away in the same condition. That man, who was an Englishman, wanted to be permitted to trade in this region, but he never came back."

"What a monster Senor Goralo must be!" cried Tom.

"The veriest wretch unhung!" ejaculated Dick. "He employs his dogs to hunt his slaves who grow tired of his tyranny and attempt to escape. The hounds, like their master know no mercy."

"What does he intend to do with his riches?" Tom inquired.

"I cannot tell you. Besides his gold, he has many fine pearls which his divers wrench from the waters of the Caribbean. During one of his complacent moods he showed me a lot of pearls that really made my eyes water."

"Why don't his slaves rebel?" Tom said.

"They hold him in too much terror for that," observed Dick with another smile. "At the first sign of rebellion the rebels would be set upon by the whole pack of fierce hounds and literally torn to pieces. They know this."

Tom heaved a sigh of despair.

"Then I can't see how we can ever escape from Senor Goralo's web."

"I had lost hope till you came, Tom," Dick answered, "but now I shall despair no longer."

"But what can two boys like ourselves do against a man like Pedrez Goralo?"

"We've got to put our heads together and see if two Yankee heads can't outwit a monster like him then I say we deserve to remain his slaves forever."

"I should not like to escape without helping Marcelle out of the net."

"That's it! We must assist her as well as ourselves. Possibly she knows of your coming to Esperanza. I saw her but last week riding out in the two-wheeled carriage which Senor Goralo has devoted to her use, but the eyes of half a dozen spies were on her all the time. I contrived to reach you tonight without being seen, so far as I could observe. When we meet again I may have a plan to submit."

Dick rose to go and Tom laid one hand on his shoulder.

"Remember," he said, "no escape without helping Marcelle, whoever she is."

"Oh, we'll take her into the plot," answered Dick with a cheery laugh. "I'm quite sure she is an American."

Dick was quitting the house when Tom asked to accompany him some distance, saying that there might be danger.

"Come, then," Dick said and they passed out together.

It was a beautiful tropic night. Everywhere on the ground lay the mellow moonbeams which covered it like a carpet of silver. The tall palms waved indolently in a lazy breeze and the little but strong houses of the town stood out for inspection. The streets of Esperanza were narrow affairs and not very clean and now and then a pariah dog slouched across their path hunting for a bone which might have been cast away.

Suddenly Dick drew Tom into a dark area and pointed forward.

"Look across the street," he said in a subdued whisper. "You will see something under the porch yonder."

"I see it!" Tom answered.

"One of Senor Goralo's spies," Dick Chaffee replied. "They never sleep. See! he stands as motionless as a statue. We might slip into the alley at our right, but he would follow."

"If there is none other——"

"Aye, if we but knew this," broke in Dick.

"We can try at any rate," Tom cried. "I don't fear the men of Esperanza as I do its dogs."

Under other circumstances Dick would have laughed at this remark, but now his face did not lose its immobility.

A minutes later the young castaways were running down the narrow outlet side by side. It was a near cut to Dick's abode.

When they came out of the darksome way Tom felt himself jerked by his companion and there were lips at his ear.

"Look! the dog!"

Tom had already seen the great animal which had risen in their path.

The boys recoiled a step and grasped the stout sticks which they had picked up in the area.

"He must be silenced," grated Tom in undertones and with this, before the huge brute could make a move, the boy castaway was upon him and a heavy blow sent him to earth without so much as a sound.

"On, on!" cried Dick.

Leaping over the body of the beast, the boys hastened forward and came out in the rear of Dick's quarters.

"I'll go back now," said Tom.

"What, over that dangerous way?"

"Why not? I have this," and the boy exhibited the cudgel which had finished the hound.

"Come and bunk with me," Dick went on. "We can enter the house noiselessly. The coast may be clear in an hour."

Tom consented and they entered the place, passing to Dick's room where they began to disrobe by the light of the moon.

All at once sounds of feet fell upon their ears. The door was struck a heavy blow.

"The man spider's minions!" exclaimed Dick, as he recoiled, and the boy castaways listened with bated breath to the thundering at the door.

Next week's Ledger will contain further chapters of this fine story. You will find it interesting to the end. We will give you constantly the very best stories of entertainment that money will buy, so send in your subscription and take the Ledger regularly, if you are not doing so. You will not regret it.

* * *

Conquest of the Moon.

(Continued from page eight.)

Jeroc, with his pockets still burning with the bribe money of John Dorgan—for he no longer doubted that the banker was the real figure in his financial enslavement—took to drink to ease the disappointment he felt at the failure of his mid-air strategy. He dosed himself alternately with brandy and absinthe until he was helpless. He kept up the spell of helplessness by repeating the dose whenever returning sensibility restored his abnormal thirst.

It was a week before he thought of reporting to Raymond. He went up to the Fifth avenue mansion, his step uncertain, his eyes bleared and his breath liquor-laden. He found John Dorgan alone and impatient to hear his report of developments.

"Monsieur, I am sorry," apologized Jeroc, "but eet ees nothing I have to report. Babcock, he ees too close with ze mouth. He weel not talk even to me more. I am deescharged—fired."

"You mean you no longer have entrance to the building of the new airship?" inquired the banker gruffly, carefully noting the face of the Frenchman.

"Right," blustered the latter, "right ze very feerst time."

"How did it happen?" demanded the financier.

"Eet was thees way," began the mechanician, extending his arm in emphatic gesture. "Babcock he take me up in his fast 'Rapier' to see how high we can go. When we get up two three miles, he say, 'Jeroc, you try to steal my airship secrets, eh?' I say, 'Oh, no, monsieur. That ees not so.' Then he say, 'You lie to me, you traitor. I weel shoot you,' and he pulls ze revolver and push eet een my face. I heet heem in ze face. I knock heem out. I breeng ze 'Rapier' down to ze ground. Then he come to, he tell me he cannot trust me, he geev me ze fire."

"So you have nothing to show for the thousand dollars advanced to you?"

Jeroc's eyes opened and closed uncertainly. His face twitched and his hands flopped about curiously. The liquor he had poured into his stomach to brace himself for this interview was beginning to extend its influence to his brain.

"Oh, say not so," he gurgled with a foolish grin.

"You've been drinking, sir," declared the banker with a scowl.

"Dreenking? Ah, monsieur, you do me ze wrong," whined the mechanician.

"Well, what do you propose to do now?"

"Eet ees not so easy to find out ze moon secrets now. Babcock, he tell me he weel knock me head off eef he find me around hee's hangar again."

"I've half a mind to call the whole deal off," snorted the banker, as he watched the other man's face to note the influence of his threat.

"Ah, say not so, monsieur," begged Jeroc plaintively. "I weel do bettaire."

Dorgan took a hasty turn in his walk up and down the apartment and stopping before the mechanician seized him by the shoulders and shook him vigorously.

"Man alive," he hissed at the trembling figure, "don't you know you're letting a fortune slip through your fingers?"

"Ze fortune, yes," stammered the Frenchman. "Ze two hundred and feefty thousand dollaire your friend promise me certain ees ze beeg fortune. But what can I do?" and he shrugged his shoulders bewildered.

Dorgan let go his hold and stepped back a pace. Then he glared at the mechanician so sternly that it helped to clear his liquor-clouded brain.

"You don't suppose," the banker exclaimed as he flung away his cigar, "that we're trying to send you to the moon just for the glory of it, do you?"

"No, no, monsieur? Eet ees something bettaire than that. But what ees eet?"

"Jeroc."—Dorgan's eyes sparkled with money lust as he went on—"we are sending you up there to get diamonds, do you hear?—bigger ones than we can find down here—bushels of them, man, bushels of them, do you hear? We want to get there first so as to get all of them."

One might have thought from the wild look in John Dorgan's eyes that his greed had gone to his brain. It stirred this crafty foreign tool of his so deeply that he fairly gasped:

"Diamonds, did you say? Diamonds by ze bushel up there? How do you know, monsieur?"

"I have seen one of them—as big almost as your fist."

The cunning eyes of the mechanician twinkled.

"By ze hook or ze crook we weel get them, zen," he cried.

The banker gripped himself to recover his wonted calm.

"Yes, yes, we must get them. For we could buy the whole earth with them." He paused to draw his hand across his brow. "I've been thinking of a way, too, that you could get this precious new airship of Babcock's. You could wait and watch until it is quite ready to start. Then you could—" The man of millions paused with a significant glance.

"Yees, yees, I see," laughed Joroc, his traitorous eyes agleam. "Eet ees all so seemple now. I weel steal ze Babcock flyer, ees eet not?"

"That's the idea exactly, Jeroc. But can you do it?"

"Can I steal ze airship?" returned the Frenchman scornfully. "Ha, eet ees so easy. Why did eet not come to us before? Steal ze airship? Monsieur, ees ze ceench. Watch me."

This extremely interesting story will be continued in next week's Ledger. If you are not a subscriber to the Ledger, you are strongly urged to send in your subscription at once. Every family should take the Ledger, as humor and stories and pic[illegible] make life brighter and pleasante[illegible] all, bringing health and entertainment and doing every one good.

* * *

The Black Horse Queen.

(Continued from page seventeen.)

Leedron's hour of nervousness was past. Fully face to face with the danger, his native courage rose superior to weakness and his strong face was firm, though pale.

"There is no medicine except at Gilbraith!" he replied—"down there!" and he pointed to the valley.

"Then we must have it from there!"

"But they are our deadly foes—"

"And Harney and his wife will die! Think well—what can be done?"

"We are hedged in. I would gladly go, losing my life if need be, but the sacrifice would be useless. Like Roebuck, Rudd, Kendall and others, I am well known there. Asa Dickson ventures out about once a year, else we would lack some things we have to get. He has a sympathetic cousin there who accumulates our necessities by piecemeal, and has them ready in bulk when Asa visits him. In that way we obtain what we cannot raise in our refuge. But Asa, too, is known there. Could he get medicine?"

"Is there a doctor at Gilbraith, and, if so, what is he like?—how zealous among those valley people? And what is his age?"

"Doctor Appleby is there, and none in Gilbraith is more zealous than he; yes, he is radically fanatic. But he is now old, and I am informed that he is so feeble that all patients have to go to his house."

"Good! I will go to Dr. Appleby!"

"You!" gasped Leedron.

"Yes. If Dickson goes he must have a prescription, or he cannot get what is needed. Well, if he is questioned—what then?"

"Bad, bad! Worse yet, I am sure that Appleby was once Asa's family physician. He must surely know Dickson."

"There you have it. Again, listen! I will go. I will appear to Appleby and say that I came from the Pathowick trail; that a wagon train is held up there by fever; that a doctor is there but cannot leave, and so I have brought a prescription. Appleby, being old and afflicted, cannot offer to go with me, so—lo! he will give me the medicine, and I will come back and cure Harney and his wife and check the epidemic!"

"Dale, God bless you! But do you know that any man leaving this Haven is likely to be seen as he goes and shot dead?"

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* * *

It Often Is.

"I was in hopes, when I married, that I could give my wife everything she wanted."

"Well?"

"I didn't think her yearning capacity would be so much greater than my earning capacity."

* * *

Quickly Tired of Her.

"Before we married, George, you said mother could stay with us whenever she pleased."

"Yes, my dear, but since our marriage she has ceased to please."

FOR YOUTHFUL EYES

KEEP UP.

Roy has a pair of roller skates,
  Ball-bearing skates, all new and bright,
And down the street he skates with glee,
  Nor swerves he to the left or right.

But, oh! Alas! How sad to see!
  The skates go faster than the boy,
And, while they smoothly coast ahead,
  A little way behind is Roy.

The tumble comes, and Roy sits down;
  His speedy feet he contemplates.
Take warning by this, girls and boys,
  And don't go slower than your skates.

❧

Tit for Tat.

Jim and Jessie were twins, as much alike as two peas in a pod, with this awful difference—one was a boy and the other was a girl. While Jim was small enough to wear long curls and pinafores, you couldn't tell which was which, but when he got rid of his curls and went into trousers, everything was changed. He began to put on lordly airs and order Jessie about. Jessie opened her blue eyes at first in astonishment. She never thought about the trousers, but though she was only a girl, she had plenty of spirit and would not be imposed upon.

"I wish," said Jim one day, "that you'd mend these holes in my stockings, Jess," and he held up a pair of dreadful-looking objects.

"What will you give me?" asked Jessie.

"I'll say 'thank you' and let you watch me sail my new boat," he answered, condescendingly.

"That's not fair," began Jessie, and mamma broke in:

"I should say not! If Jessie is to darn your stockings there must be tit for tat. Now, listen to my plan for the winter, which, understand," and mamma shook her finger warningly, "must be followed rigidly. From today I organize a 'Tit for Tat' Society. Jessie, I know, will agree to darn your week's supply of stockings, in return for which every Wednesday and Saturday you must play bootblack. If you fail to polish her shoes on those days you will be forced to carry the holes in your stockings over till the next week; and if Jessie fails to see that you are properly provided the shoes will go unpolished. Now, all in favor of my plan say 'Ay.'"

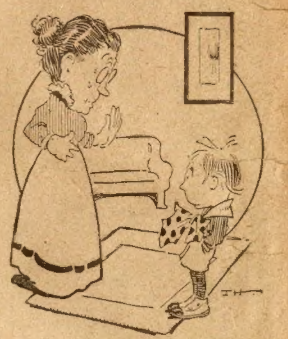
"Ay, ay," they both cried, and it was adopted at once.

❧

An Irreligious Duck.

A duck went to church in the city of Washington a few Sundays ago. It nearly broke up the meeting, because to everything that the missionary-speaker was saying it replied, "Quack! Quack!" It kept on being impolite until a deacon chased it away from the door.

Too Much Water.



His Aunt (on a visit)—Heavens! but you are growing fast, Willie.

Willie (aged 7)—Yes; I'm afraid nurse waters me too much. She gives a bath every day.

❧

HELP WANTED.

Wanted: Boys that I can trust,
  Boys whose words and deeds ring true,
Boys of courage, brave and just,
  I have work for them to do.

Wanted: Boys prepared to seize
  Opportunities I give,
Use them till they grow to men,
  Not afraid to die—or live.

Wanted: Boys of stalwart stuff,
  Unafraid to work or play,
Boys that reverence my flag,
  And know what it means today.

To such boys no bondage drear
  In my army or my fleet,
Only when I choose to call
  Loyal hearts and ready feet.

To such boys rewards are great.
  They may climb from fame to fame.
They may win from poverty
  Honor and a glorious name.

Come now, boys, apply at once,
  Liberal and just I am.
Mind, I want no lazy dunce.
  Please address to UNCLE SAM.

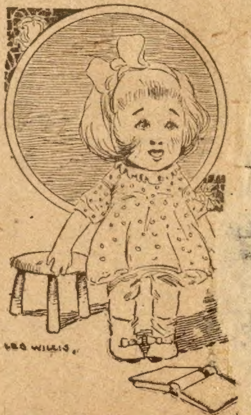
❧

Kite Flying.

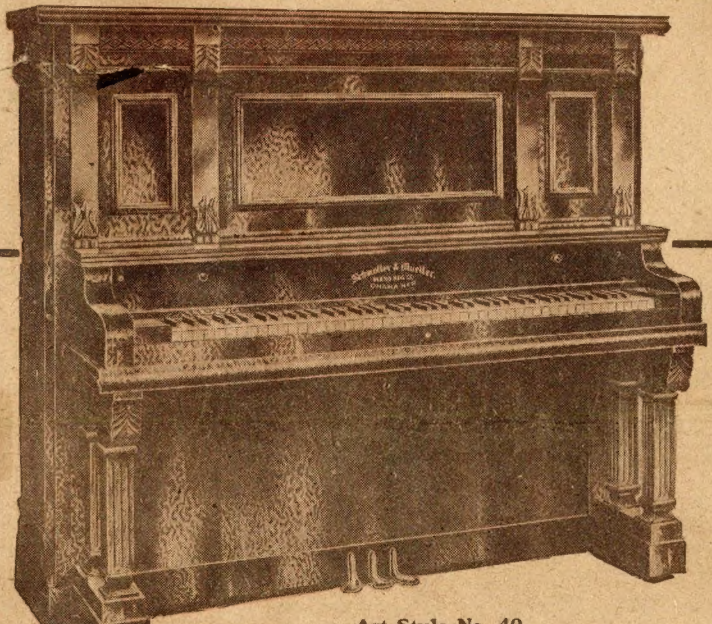
One of the biggest jobs of kite flying ever attempted has made all the little California boys jealous. They can fly their own kites, but they think it is not fair of the United States Government to use a war vessel for the same sport. They have heard of the flight made recently by Lieutenant John Rodgers, who went up 400 feet into the air as ballast for a string of box kites. The kites were kept in the air by the motion of the cruiser Pennsylvania, which steamed at the rate of thirteen sea-miles an hour out in the Pacific Ocean with the man and his queer support towed a quarter of a mile behind. The lieutenant stayed in the air fifteen minutes taking photographs and making observations. Th height he reached is said in Californi to be the greatest in the history of suc flights.

❧

A Question.



I held my book upon my lap;
  It dropped when I arose.
When one stands up where does one's
  Go to, do you suppose?



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